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COMPARING TURNAROUND LEADERSHIP IN A RURAL CHURCH
AND IN SCHOOLS

By

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A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the
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and
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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Leadership, Foundations, and Human Resource Education
University of Louisville
and
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May 2011

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A Dissertation Approved on

March 31, 2011

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents

Ron Neville Mays

and

the late Norma Fite Mays

for teaching me that my best gift to God lies in developing the gifts He has given to me.

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I would like to thank my committee co-chairs, Dr. Ric Keaster and Dr. Sharon Spall, for their patience, endurance, prodding, and understanding in the many starts and stops of this process. I would also like to thank the other members of my committee, Dr. Dr. Phyllis Connelly, Dr. Susan Lasky, and Dr. Bud Schlinker, for their comments, assistance, and willingness to work “unconventionally” through this process. I am forever grateful to my sisters, Tana Jones and Deena Green, who have always supported my quests in higher education, and who along with my aunt, Lana Ward, have tried to fill the holes left for this “Mama’s boy” when cancer took Mom from us in 2005. Also, thanks to Aunt Lana and Carolyn Jones for giving me transcripts in a hurry when the clock was ticking. I must also say thanks to my second family, J.C. & Melinda Popplewell, for opening their home and hearts to me when I began my graduate studies many years ago.

I must thank my middle school science teacher, Don Oldham, who was the first person who I remember saying, “Someday it is going to be Dr. Mays,” and planting the seed in my heart. Additionally, Rev. J.C. Greenwell was faithful from before I started this journey, through the many years it took to complete it, to let me know that quitting was not an option, for the sake of my future service to the Lord. I am also indebted to Jim and New Life Church for allowing me the opportunity and privilege to tell their story of God’s great work in their congregation. Finally, all praise and gratitude go primarily to my Heavenly Father and His Son Jesus Christ for blessing me beyond measure.

ABSTRACT

COMPARING TURNAROUND LEADERSHIP IN A RURAL CHURCH
AND IN SCHOOLS

Ronald B. Mays

March 31, 2011

This qualitative study sought to illuminate successful practices of a turnaround leader in a rural church that are applicable cross-contextually, so as to inform the leadership efforts of various organizations seeking to reproduce organizational renewal on a wide-scale basis. Utilizing the principles of case study research, the researcher conducted participant observations, mined documents, and interviewed the pastor, three part-time staff members, and 24 members of a rural congregation in a South-central Kentucky congregation that had grown 289% in active membership over the last 14 years. Proceeding with the assumption that leaders can, by the practice of specific, intentional behaviors, positively impact the ability of a congregation to reverse its path and experience turnaround, and seeking to illuminate those behaviors, this study was guided by the following research questions: (a) In a rural church that has experienced revitalization (“organizational turnaround”), how do the pastor and congregants perceive the experience? (b) How do they perceive the characteristics and behaviors of the pastor as “catalysts” in this transformation? (c) What leadership principles of successful turnaround church efforts can be extracted from their experiences that are comparable to those reported in the literature on school revitalization efforts?

The data from the study revealed that members did not recall specific events that led to turnaround so clearly as they recalled unity and harmony; this was contrasted to the period of turmoil and split immediately before the turnaround and the initial, devastating split it endured 20 years prior. They did not describe events as much as they did their pastor who helped bring peace and a culture that was conducive to revitalization. With perhaps some credit to a youth program that was started under a previous pastor, and reinstated by under the turnaround pastor's leadership, responses to the question of precipitants to growth essentially described their pastor's personality—a) a people person and b) a detail person—and five intentional behaviors—a) developing a community presence, b) providing quality, meaningful worship, c) educating and equipping members, d) providing a vision for the future, and e) empowering and mobilizing the laity.

This study revealed consistent themes that existed in the theoretical framework on schools provided by Kouzes and Posner (1987) as well as in the church and school turnaround lore. These findings propagate the notion that turnaround leaders often bear striking resemblances to one another, exhibiting many of the same personal character traits and intentional behaviors. These findings also suggest that turnaround leadership is not so much a product of individual, charismatic leadership as it the product of consistent, sustained attention to sound leadership behaviors.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

When Bennis & Nanus (1985) declared, “The problem with many organizations, and especially the ones that are failing, is that they tend to be overmanaged and underled” (p. 21), many businesses and institutions began to think more seriously about the notion of leadership. When the authors expanded their assertion by adding, “Managers are people who do things right and leaders are people who do the right thing” (p. 21), entire disciplines developed seeking to discover what it indeed meant to be *effective* rather than just *efficient*. If there were *things* that good leaders *did* consistently and cross-contextually, then those behaviors should be mimicked. If, in fact, leaders were not just born but could rather be made, then universities and institutions should be able to create a generation of better leadership in business and industry.

It was only a matter of time before our society saddled the same expectations of accountability and innovative leadership on our school systems. The school reform movement of the late 1990s took its cues from the leadership revolution taking place in industry and business, and educational institutions began to develop new paradigms for its leaders. Believing that instructional leadership images were no longer adequate, Leithwood (1994) and others began to promote leadership which could exact “employee motivation and commitment leading to the kind of extra effort required for significant change” (pp. 499-500). Years before, Burns (1978) described “transformational leadership” as attributes and behaviors that contributed to school effectiveness and

student success, raising one another to higher levels of motivation and morality, and elevating the level of human conduct and ethical aspirations of both the leader and the led, and a group of researchers (e.g., Jason, 2000; Kirby, Paradise & King, 1992; Koehler, Wallbrown, & Konner, 1994) began to study principals who were indeed making a difference in their schools, developing a body of literature describing the transformational leadership phenomenon.

For churches and church leaders in the United States, the motivations for studying effective leadership are vastly different than those of educators. Of the 400,000 churches in the United States, 85 % are plateaued or declining in membership (Page, 2008; Wood, 2001). While the national population had increased by 11.4 % in the decade prior to 1998, the communicant membership of all Protestant denominations declined by 9.5 %, and over 70 churches per week closed (Wood, 2001). Another study indicated that between 1991 and 2002 a 15% percent increase in the adult population of the United States was accompanied by a doubling of the number of adults who did not attend church during that same period (Stetzer & Dodson, 2007). The reality of decline, coupled with what many would consider a movement towards a “post-Christian” society similar to that of most of Europe (Page, 2008), has fueled an interest in the stories of those churches who are indeed growing and reaching the unchurched masses. With so many churches in dire need of effective leadership to change their courses, seminaries and church leaders are studying the personalities, priorities, and practices of those who are transforming congregations in hopes of replicating those results in multiple locations.

Statement of the Problem

The discipline of church growth studies within academia can trace its beginnings essentially within the past four decades with the publication of McGavran's (1970) seminal work, *Understanding Church Growth*. Many persons studying within the discipline would still consider it an emerging phenomenon, finding it a priority at only selected evangelical seminaries across the nation. Wagner (1989) noted that some might still argue that such studies of growing congregations and their pastors is akin to idolatry by crediting to man what God alone has accomplished. Yet, Woods (2001) encouraged pastors to embrace the notion that ordinary people can participate in the great work of Christianity when they discover that God has accomplished His work through those who practice sound leadership principles and set specific priorities for ministry (pp. 10-11).

Many who have participated in church growth studies realize that the vast majority of the congregations that are growing and reaching the unchurched are fairly new congregations. Hunter (1996) noted that the declining morale in most mainline Protestant churches and the increasing focus on political correctness, ecumenism, and ecclesial affairs rather than mission leaves many with a lack of faith that many existing denominations can effectively spread the faith, noting that "major paradigm shifts seldom occur in the establishment" (p. 19). Understanding the resistance to change and the difficulty in overcoming barriers to growth in established congregations led Wagner (1989) to assert, "Planting new churches is the most effective evangelistic methodology known under heaven" (pp. 168-169). The success of churches like Rick Warren's Saddleback Valley Community Church and Bill Hybels' Willow Creek Community

Church highlight the purpose-driven, seeker-sensitive church movements that created mega-churches from scratch within the life of a single pastor.

However, the reality that many church leaders see is that churches throughout North America are dying (Russell, 2004). Helping the thousands of established churches, wherein the vast majority of church resources are spent and active Christians worship on a weekly basis, is a difficult task. As author and consultant Tom Peters asserts (as cited in Page, 2008), “It is easier to kill an organization than it is to change it” (p. 9). Leaders, uncomfortable with the notion of letting the vast majority of these churches die a slow, uneventful death, began studying those pastors who have succeeded in bringing new life to congregations that had been in decline and the congregations that have experienced burgeoning growth (e.g., Crandall, 1995; Rainer, 2005; Stetzer & Dodson, 2007). Though the terminology is somewhat different in church and education literature, usually imploring the term “turnaround leadership” (Barna, 1993) instead of transformational leadership, pastors, seminary professors, and denominational executives now examine the leadership styles and habits of those who have successfully transformed established congregations.

Churches stand at critical junctures. The passing of the “greatest generation” and the increasing urbanization and mobility of our country illuminates the uncomfortable realities of dying rural—those in country or agriculture settings (Rural, 2008)—and established congregations and the meager resources available to produce a viable future. The helpful and caring nature of these congregations produce tight-knit cells where strong respect for privacy prohibits faith-sharing and evangelism. Meager financial resources coupled with an available pool of mostly urban-trained, upwardly-mobile

pastors produce a succession of short-term pastorates. Years of decline and population relocation have produced depression and despair with paralyzing fears of failure and change. These churches face competition and external pressures to produce different results than their pasts. They face difficult decisions about change in people and practice (Ruffcorn, 1994).

Theoretical Framework

All organizations exist for some purpose. That purpose may be general or specific, stated or assumed, and mobilizing or static. However, the success of that organization is judged by the degree to which it accomplishes its purpose and perhaps positions itself for relevance in the future. Leadership theory emerged in recent decades as researchers observed the correlation between the behaviors of leaders and the success of those organizations in achieving those purposes.

Though many authors spoke in general terms, Kouzes and Posner (1987) were among the first authors to outline more specific actions that would foster a positive momentum to accomplish organizational goals and to sustain that progress in the long run. The authors understood that leadership is a dynamic that involves relationships between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow, understanding that the person in position is not the leader until others choose to follow. Thus, it becomes incumbent upon the leader to discover ways to inspire trust, develop shared aspirations, and mobilize people to accomplish group purposes. Kouzes and Posner provided a list of ten commitments of effective leaders that would serve not as the definitive leadership formula, but rather as the springboard for motivating the study of others who are accomplishing great things through their organizations. They were among the first to

establish the notion that discovering and implementing best practices of other successful leaders—in studies such as this—is not only wise but essential for one who desires to lead an organization effectively. Those commitments proposed by the authors provide this study with its theoretical framework that will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter of this text.

Purpose of the Study

This study seeks to illuminate successful practices of a turnaround leader in a rural church that are applicable cross-contextually, so as to inform the leadership efforts of various organizations seeking to reproduce organizational renewal on a wide-scale basis.

Research Questions

- 1) In a rural church that has experienced revitalization (“organizational turnaround”), how do the pastor and congregants perceive the experience?
- 2) How do they perceive the characteristics and behaviors of the pastor as “catalysts” in this transformation?
- 3) What leadership principles of successful turnaround church efforts can be extracted from their experiences that are comparable to those reported in the literature on school revitalization efforts?

General Methodology

This study was a qualitative study designed to discover leadership characteristics and behaviors that contributed to a church experiencing a successful turnaround. The researcher defined a “turnaround church” as one that had experienced an extended period of at least 5 years of decline or plateau in membership and attendance, but had then

enjoyed a period of at least 3-5 years of significant growth in membership, attendance, program, vision, and enthusiasm. Additionally, the congregation must have experienced significant growth from professions of faith and new members, rather than transfer growth of those who may have already been attending church.

The researcher examined statistical data of congregations in the Cumberland Presbyterian denomination from 1993-2009. Data on active membership totals, Sunday School membership, professions of faith, and membership gains of the denomination's congregations revealed this congregation had experienced sustained, significant growth in a rural setting for a period exceeding 10 years, after a 5-year period of plateau and marked decline from 1993-1997.

The site selected was located in a town whose population of 13,000 was larger than the normal 10,000 population threshold utilized by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) as a definition for "rural." However, the church site selected for study was located in an area defined by the OMB as a non-metro county and as rural based upon census places and census urban areas with a population less than 50,000 and upon rural-urban commuting areas. Additionally, the county in which this church exists was designated as "The Best Place to Live in Rural America" by *The Progressive Farmer* (Link, 2009).

Once selected, the researcher obtained permission of the human subjects review boards at Western Kentucky University and the University of Louisville to conduct the study. The researcher contacted the pastor of the church and secured his and his church leadership's willingness to participate in the study. The researcher visited the congregation, and congregants completed a questionnaire that provided basic

demographic data that allowed the researcher to locate church leaders that had experienced the turnaround phenomenon, church members that had been a part of the congregation since its formation, members that had experienced the decline and turnaround, and new members who had joined since the turnaround. When insufficient members had submitted questionnaires in specific categories, the researcher utilized recommendations from the pastor, assistant pastor, and other participants to find persons who possessed valuable insight. All provided consent to participate documentation, and the researcher interviewed them—along with the pastor and church staff—using semi-structured, open-ended interviews. For purposes of verification of findings and to reveal additional areas of inquiry (Creswell, 1998), the researcher conducted on-site participant observations of corporate worship services, staff meetings, church session meetings, social events, and small group functions. Additionally, the researcher examined church session meeting minutes, newsletters and publications, belief and mission statements, teaching and sermon materials, and other artifacts to retrieve additional data.

Where possible, interviews were recorded and transcribed, and data were coded for analysis by the researcher. Through the triangulation of multiple data sources (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998), the researcher discovered convergent patterns that revealed perceptions as to the precipitants and sustaining factors of turnaround, priorities of the congregation and leadership, and specific roles that the pastor played in leading the revitalization process. To strengthen the trustworthiness of the data, the researcher kept a journal throughout the study, clarified his bias at the outset, provided opportunity for member checks of the findings from the pastor and session

(Stake, 1995), utilized rich, thick description in the final report, and maintained an audit trail of all data collected during the study.

Definitions

Congregation: An organized body of believers who meet for worship and religious instruction in a particular locality (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 1986).

Denomination: A religious organization that serves as an administrating body for a number of local congregations that subscribe to the same set of beliefs and governing structure (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 1986).

Revitalization: Restoring to a former vitality or bring to new life (Crandall, 1995).

Session: The minister in charge, or presbytery-appointed moderator, and the elders elected by the members of the congregation and installed as members of the session, charged with leading the members of a particular church in the ministries which belong to that church (Confession of Faith, 2001).

Transformational Leadership: "Leadership that facilitates the redefinition of a people's mission and vision, a renewal of their commitment, and the restructuring of their systems for goal accomplishment" (Leithwood, 1992, p. 9).

Turnaround Church: A church that at one time had been a thriving congregation, then experienced a loss of momentum or steep decline but ultimately began to grow, pulled out of the dive and became revitalized (Barna, 1993; Wood, 2001).

Assumptions

The researcher is an ordained minister in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, a small denomination clustered mostly in the Southeastern United States. He has served in

various ministry roles for 22 years, including 15 years as the senior pastor of congregations—in every instance entering a church that was in decline, including several that had experienced a church split or were facing that possibility. The researcher also has over 13 years' experience as a public school educator, and is now in his seventh year as a public high school administrator or principal. In each instance, he had led with the assumption that organizations that are not moving forward are in fact moving backwards. In each pastoral experience, he led with the belief that even those rural settings provided opportunity for growth in number and ministry activity among those who are not active in the life of other congregations. While serving in the public schools, the researcher's belief was that schools should be in perpetual pursuit of higher levels of student motivation and achievement. Likewise, a second related assumption was that congregations or schools that are not participating in the expansion of Christianity to new believers or experiencing higher levels of achievement are not healthy. They are not functioning as they are capable, and they are in need of turnaround leadership.

A third assumption was that these organizations can, with the right leadership, experience revitalization with a renewed purpose and energy. Further, it was assumed that the leadership skills necessary to bring turnaround in a rural setting, where populations are often more stable or declining and less accustomed to change, are very different from those which might be successful in an urban area—thus the need for a study specific to a rural population. However, this belief did not preclude the fundamental assumption that people are basically the same, that their motivations and aspirations to be a part “of the living” are common and that understanding these turnaround experiences might serve as a guidepost for other groups experiencing decline.

The researcher assumed that in many ways successful leadership must be adaptable, but it is not necessarily contextually limited—that leading people who are demoralized and directionless to a state of renewed vitality, purpose, and growth is the function of successfully understanding and working through people. Finally, the researcher assumed that such leadership was reproducible by those who were not necessarily the gifted, but rather the intentional.

Limitations

As with any study, this research offers only a small glimpse into a larger picture of turnaround that occurs in rural churches. As this study was completed in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a doctoral degree and was not conducted in conjunction with other researchers, it suffers from a single researcher bias, both in pre-conceived assumptions as a trained and experienced pastor of what is proper and effective, and in perspective as a single set of eyes trying to capture a photograph of a phenomenon that is fully incapable of being contained within the pages of such a study.

Further, a characteristic of a rural setting is its tight-knit, sometimes closed community that is often uncomfortable with an outsider full of questions. The researcher understands that an abbreviated on-site period may have prohibited the building of significant relationships that opens the door for honest reflection and sharing which might have occurred with a much longer immersion into the life of the congregation. Small towns do not often provide the luxury of anonymity, and many interviewees may have been reluctant to share freely for fear that they might be viewed unfavorably, or equally disturbing in a church-setting, as judgmental and un-Christian.

As this study was conducted in a single church, and understanding that no two churches are exactly alike, the researcher understands that some strategies employed to exact turnaround in this church may be entirely contextually valuable. Even though rural areas have many characteristics in common, each one also has its unique personality and set of circumstances that have formed its culture. Likewise, the choice of a single, small denomination as the research base for congregations that met the turnaround criteria may make some findings relevant only within that particular body of believers. That so few churches met the turnaround criteria within this denomination provided very little opportunity to compare leaders in similar settings who have achieved similar results or to study community effects on similar congregations.

Significance of the Study

Leadership studies in business, school administration, and pastoral preparations often operate from a foundation of similar principles. Both in universities and seminaries, many have discovered laws of leadership that transcend a particular context and are beneficial for anyone seeking to produce results through others. Referring to education, Murphy and Meyers (as cited in Viadero, 2007) stated, “there is something to be learned from what other organizations have done in the corporate world, in churches, hospitals, and police departments, and, surely, there are things that are applicable to our business” (p. 1). After reviewing studies across a wide range of organizations including nonprofits, government agencies, and for-profits – specifically analyzing the Continental Airlines and New York City police department turnarounds – Hassel and Hassel (2009) concluded that “the turnaround precursors, patterns of action, and chronically challenging environments we found were surprisingly consistent across these varied venues”(p. 22).

Perhaps then, businesses, who become successful through the efforts and talents of their employees; public schools, who are ultimately judged according to the performance of the students they inherit; and churches, who prosper through the efforts of the voluntary constituents, may find insight for their tasks by studying the practices of “accomplishing through others” found in the successful stories of one another.

Turnaround church studies represent an emerging interest in scholarly work. Few works were published prior to the beginning of the new millennium that addressed church revitalization. While Barna (1993) was the first to reference “turnaround churches,” only a few others imploring terms such as “new life” (Sims, 1992), “come back churches” (Frazee, 1995), and congregational “change” (Malphurs, 1993) addressed issues of church revitalization. Even as turnaround leadership literature has become more prevalent in this decade (e.g., Harding, 2007; Russell, 2004; Wood, 2001), Crandall’s (1995) work remains one of only a few that specifically targets turnaround issues of the small congregation. Though data were collected from rural churches as part of Crandall’s work, the work did not provide specific focus on rural church issues. For the purpose of this study, the researcher examined a turnaround congregation located in an area that met both population and lifestyle definitions of a rural setting to seek and discover factors that contributed to revitalization in that setting that might inform those seeking to lead turnaround in similar and other settings.

Summary

This chapter has served to introduce this study, which seeks to illuminate successful practices of turnaround leaders in rural churches that are applicable cross-contextually, so as to inform the leadership efforts of various organizations seeking to

reproduce organizational renewal on a wide-scale basis. This introduction has shed light on the motivations for studying such successes and engaging in the work of reproducing turnaround in churches and schools in our country. The researcher has included his theoretical framework and research questions used to guide his research, his methodology for data collection and analysis, relevant definitions, key assumptions, and limitations of the research findings. Chapter II will examine the relevant literature that provides a framework for the study of turnaround leadership as it compares to transformational leadership and connects the two areas of research for cross-contextual applications.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This review of literature is designed to give an overview of the study of turnaround leadership in church settings and its similarities to tenets of transformational leadership in educational settings. While all successful leadership has some contextual limitations, the scope of this inquiry desires to examine the cross-contextual similarities of leading people to a revitalization of outlook and vitality in very different organization contexts from the very similar context of an establishment in decline. This overview also supports the necessity of continued study of leadership behaviors that are both contingent and universal and that bear record of their contribution to institutional effectiveness.

Theoretical Framework

According to Kouzes and Posner (1987), people want and need leadership, and that leadership matters in the degree to which an organization is successful in attaining its goals. Those assertions were fundamental in a burgeoning study of leadership that began in earnest in the 1980's. These authors proposed that core leadership priorities and practices were prevalent across successful leaders in multiple contexts. That seminal work has been updated and reprinted three times over the decades since and has become a textbook for aspiring leaders; yet, Kouzes and Posner (2002) suggested that the content of effective leadership has not changed, though the contexts for that leadership practice has changed significantly.

The original work contained ten commitments that, if practiced regularly and with integrity by leaders, would contribute to extraordinary results within an organization. Many studies—several of which are outlined in the pages that follow—have discovered validity in these commitments as actions that contribute positively to leading successful turnaround in business, school, church, and other settings. Kouzes and Posner (2002) refined their categories to five broader “practices of exemplary leadership” which contain the ten commitments—with two combined into one—as sub categories, plus one additional commitment. Those five practices include the leader’s ability to a) model the way, b) inspire a shared vision, c) challenge the process, d) enable others to act, and e) encourage the heart.

The original commitment categories provided more specific actions that add flesh to the abstract notions of Kouzes and Posner’s (2002) practices. Modeling the way is first accomplished as the leader clarifies his or her personal values and establishes a level of competence to champion those values. Secondly, the leader must set the example by aligning actions with those values. In simpler terms, the leader’s walk must match the talk. The exemplary leader also inspires a shared vision by envisioning an exciting and meaningful future, and then enlisting others in the pursuit of that vision by appealing to shared aspirations and motivations.

These leaders, according to Kouzes and Posner (2002), challenge the process by searching for opportunities to incorporate innovations, creativity, and fresh ideas that will help the organization grow and improve. Two of the original ten commitments are incorporated into the second means by which the exemplary leader challenges the process—experimenting and taking risks by constantly generating small wins and

learning from mistakes. The innovative process—even if coupled with measures of failure and refinement—strengthens the organization, while the small wins bolster an optimism to keep striving for better.

The successful leaders understand the need for more intellectual capital than they can provide and invest efforts in enabling others to act to solve problems and establish ownership in the health of the organization. They strengthen others by sharing power and discretion, developing competence and confidence, and fostering accountability. These leaders build leadership capacity in others through fostering collaboration for cooperative goals, collaboration that is only possible as members build trust in the motives and competencies of others. Finally, the exemplary leaders understand their task is a marathon, not a sprint, and understand the importance of encouraging hearts of those within the organization. CEOs, principals, pastors, and other leaders establish high expectations based on clear standards that are promoted each time individual excellence and contributions toward group goals are recognized and appreciated. Additionally, leaders develop a spirit of community as they celebrate the values and victories that define the organization.

These core practices provide the leadership theory that undergirds this study of turnaround leadership. These priorities weave through the pages that follow, outlining studies of successful leaders who transformed the schools and churches which they inherited, affirming the proposition of Kouzes and Posner (2002) that core leadership practices have not changed, only the contexts in which they are applied to contribute to organizational success.

Introduction

This review is divided into two major sections: (a) a brief introduction to transformational leadership in educational settings and (b) a more thorough study of turnaround leadership in church settings. For comparison's sake, each section is divided into the same four sub-sections which are helpful in capsulizing the literature: (a) evidence of leader impact, (b) paradigms of leadership, (c) character attributes of the leader, and (d) overt leader behaviors that contribute to revitalization. The researcher conducted the school leadership literature overview, which is much larger in quantity and diversity than is provided in the "younger" discipline of church turnaround study, to provide an opportunity for comparison in similarity of findings. Because the primary purpose of these disciplines of study is organizational renewal and the ability to replicate revitalization in other struggling groups, the last sub-section of each section, discovering the things leaders can do to foster renewal, summarizes the relative weight of information that is available in the literature.

Transformational Leadership In School Settings

Evidence of Principal Impact in Schools

So convinced of the importance of the leader in their studies of turnaround organizations, Hassel and Hassel (2009) asserted, "Bad-to-great transformations require a point-guard leader who both drives key changes and deftly influences stakeholders to support and engage in dramatic transformations"(p. 22). Murphy (2010), after reviewing many studies on turning around non-education organizations and several education studies, asserted that educational institutions can learn valuable lessons for the work of turning around troubled schools from outside the education field. Although proposing

that not all failing schools are worth saving and that fresh starts might be more beneficial, the author suggested that a focus on the leadership of the organization should be the initial strategy. In the studies he reviewed, leadership proved to be critically important, so much so that in almost all successful turnaround cases, the current leaders, or at least some key personnel, were replaced by those with industry expertise.

To test that assertion in educational settings, the essential question with which to begin is “Do principals make a difference in their schools?” Hipp (1996) explored the relationships between principal leadership behaviors and teacher sense of efficacy in selected middle schools in Wisconsin involved in significant building-level change efforts. The theoretical framework for this study was grounded in Bandura’s (1977) cognitive social learning theory of self-efficacy, which addressed motivation based on appraisals of outcomes and feedbacks. More specifically, the study was based on Hoy and Woolfolk’s (1993) two dimensional construct of self-efficacy, general teaching efficacy (GTE) and personal teaching efficacy (PTE), as adapted from Bandura. The research project was guided by the following research questions:

- 1) Are selected leadership behaviors of principals related to teachers’ general teaching efficacy and personal teaching efficacy?
- 2) In what ways do principals influence teachers’ sense of efficacy?
- 3) What constraints limit the influence of principals’ leadership behaviors on teachers’ sense of efficacy?

Hipp (1996) employed a multiple-methods design for this study. The researcher collected survey data from 10 principals and 280 teachers from 10 selected middle schools. The investigator contacted by telephone 14 educational experts, representing a

variety of agencies in the state, and asked them to identify schools undergoing significant building-level change efforts. These experts nominated 62 schools, and the researcher conducted telephone interviews with all 62 principals. These interviews provided information regarding the specific change effort, the extent of teacher involvement, and the level of principal involvement in that change effort. The criteria utilized to select the 10 schools were (a) principals had to have served as administrators in the building for 2 or more years, (b) the school had to be involved in a significant change effort related to curriculum or staff development designed to affect student performance, (c) the innovation had to involve a majority of the staff, and (d) the change effort needed to be implemented beyond the initial stage.

The dependent variables for Phase 1 of the study were general teacher efficacy and personal teacher efficacy, measured by teachers' responses to a 16-item modified version of Gibson and Dembo's Teacher Efficacy Scale (1984). The independent variable for this phase was "principals' behaviors" using teacher and principal responses to 34 items from "The Nature of Leadership" portion of The Change in Secondary Schools: Staff Survey (Leithwood, 1993). Hipp (1996) also developed a personal data sheet to gather descriptive data on the personal characteristics of teachers.

For Phase 2 of the study, Hipp (1996) conducted structured interviews with each of the 10 building principals. Additionally, the researcher interviewed a representative sample of 34 teachers from three of the represented schools. The criteria for selection of those schools were (a) the school with the highest reported general teaching efficacy (GTE), (b) the school with the highest reported personal teaching efficacy (PTE), and (c) the school with the lowest reported combined efficacy. The interviews consisted of open-

ended questions probing sources of teacher efficacy, principal behaviors deemed most important in acquiring and maintaining a sense of teacher competence, principal support for implementation of a change effort, and constraints that deprive teachers of principal influence.

To address the major research questions and test the hypotheses of the study, Hipp (1996) employed multiple levels of analysis to explore relationships among variables within the individual, within the school, and across schools. The researcher triangulated the data from the Personal Data Sheet, the Teacher Efficacy Scale, The Nature of Leadership Survey, and 44 structured interviews for purpose of interpretation.

Descriptive statistics, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), and correlational analysis provided information regarding significant relationships and differences among variables pertinent to the study by and across schools. The investigator read, coded, and grouped interview data by themes within the individual schools, then analyzed similarities and differences between teachers and their respective principals. A cross case analysis of the three case study sites provided principal leadership themes related to teachers' sense of efficacy. Hipp compared the survey and qualitative data and then used the interview data from the other seven principals to confirm data analyzed from the three sites.

The data generated by a correlational analysis indicated that significant relationships existed between both GTE and PTE and the principal behaviors of "models behavior and provides contingent rewards." Additionally, the principal behavior of "inspires group purpose" held significant relationship to GTE. Though a direct relationship between principals' behaviors and student achievement was difficult to verify, the link between teacher efficacy and student achievement was well established. If

this study confirms that principal behaviors do, however, have a significant positive effect on teacher efficacy, then it can logically follow that principal behaviors can have an impact on student achievement through the avenues of fostering positive levels of teacher efficacy.

Others have understood that principal influence must not be measured only in student variables, but also in the effects the principals exert upon their faculties. Keedy and Simpson (2002) examined the flow of influence within four American high schools at two levels: from principal to teacher and teacher to principal. Utilizing the comparative case study method, they examined the cultural indications of the principal influencing and being influenced by others. The researchers used a purposeful sample of four principals who were credited with leading their schools through dramatic “turnarounds” and presiding over a marked improvement in student outcomes. During week-long site visits, the researchers interviewed principals daily to discern administrative intentions. Ten representatives of the faculty, selected by the principal and guaranteed with confidentiality, participated in interviews to gain their perceptions of administrative priorities. Keedy and Simpson then established lists of school norms for each school – data collected through teacher interviews. Teachers then completed a “yes,” “no,” or “unsure” checklist to ascertain whether these norms were generalizable in their schools.

The inductive analysis of principal interviews, checked through observation and teacher agreement, allowed the investigators to establish three central “priorities for action” for three of the principals and two for the other principal. That 10 of the 11 total priorities reported by principals were confirmed by teachers, even when some did not necessarily agree with those priorities, indicated that a high level of influence flowed

from principal to teacher. The flow of influence from teacher to principal, however, seemed only to be evident at the two schools whose principals held empowering and building relationships with teachers as stated priorities. One principal's priority of student equity seemed to have constructed barriers to "bottom-to-top" influence, while another's preference of a power base with parents and desire for dramatic institutional change created a very traditional position of managerial control in that school. The results indicated that, despite attempts by reformers to involve teachers in school decision-making functions, the ability of teachers to influence principals remained an ideal rather than a reality (Keedy & Simpson, 2002).

The influence of principals, then, can operate on multiple levels, and generally should be examined in their interrelatedness. Lucas and Valentine (2002) investigated the relationships among principal transformational leadership, leadership team transformational leadership, and school culture. The researchers used a direct-effects approach to quantitatively determine if there were significant relationships between the principal transformational leadership and the leadership team's transformational leadership, between the principal transformational leadership and school culture, or between the leadership team's transformational leadership and school culture. They also utilized the mediated-effects framework to ascertain whether the principal leadership in regards to shaping school culture was mediated through the leadership team. Qualitative data obtained through semi-structured group interview enriched the findings.

The participants in the study were 475 faculty members ($N = 475$) and 47 leadership team members ($N = 47$) from 12 middle schools that participated in the second cohort of Project ASSIST, a statewide improvement project facilitated by the University

of Missouri-Columbia. Three instruments provided the quantitative data: (a) the Principal Leadership Questionnaire (Jantzi & Leithwood, 1996), used to measure six factors of principal transformational leadership as perceived by the school leadership team; (b) the Team Leadership Questionnaire (Jantzi & Leithwood, 1996), used to measure six factors of leadership team transformational leadership as perceived by members of each school's faculty; and (c) the School Culture Survey (Gruenert & Valentine, 1998), used to measure six factors of school culture. Data were analyzed using correlational and regression analysis.

Results indicated that the principal seemed to be the primary influence in identifying and articulating a vision and providing appropriate models of behavior, both of which appeared to be mediated by the leadership team. In relation to school culture, the principal also appeared to exert the greatest influence on teacher collaboration and unity of purpose. The leadership teams seem to be the primary source of providing intellectual stimulation and holding high expectations, and upon holding collaborative leadership and learning partnership within the school culture. These findings support the current reform efforts, which suggest that principals should expend great quantities of time and energy in developing a strong cadre of teacher and community leaders. The mediating effects of the leadership teams indicate that principals benefit greatly from shared decision-making processes whereby other stakeholders develop ownership of school goals and expectations. The synergy created by these teacher-leaders reverberates through the school and produces factors leading to school effectiveness.

Seeking to discover the extent to which leadership influences a school's effectiveness or ineffectiveness and the amount of a school's impact on student

achievement a school's leadership plays, Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of quantitative studies of building leadership and student achievement. The analysis examined 69 studies involving 2,802 schools, approximately 1.4 million students, and 14,000 teachers, and computed the correlation between the leadership behavior of the principal in the school and the average academic achievement of students in the school. The studies represented were completed between 1978-2001 and represented elementary, middle, and high schools. Based upon their finding of a .25 correlation between that leadership behavior and student achievement, the researchers asserted that principals could have a profound impact on the overall academic achievement of students in their schools.

In examining the 27 studies of measured effects of leadership within schools, Robinson et al.(2008) discovered that 15 of those studies confined their analysis to the school principal only, while twelve examined a distributed view of leadership. Twenty-two of those studies examined only academic outcomes, four only social and attitudinal outcomes, and one included both types of outcomes. The meta-analysis, however, provided a conversion to a standardized measure of the magnitude of the effect. The first meta-analysis conducted by the researchers, involving 22 of the 27 studies, compared the effects of transformational leadership and instructional leadership on student outcomes. Robinson et al. (2008) interpreted their findings as weak to small impact from transformational leadership, whereas the instructional leadership findings were mixed, with eight revealing small to weak impact and eight revealing moderate to large impact. These findings suggested that the average effect of instructional leadership on student outcomes was three to four times that of transformational leadership. The second meta-

analysis conducted by Robinson, et al. (2008) involved 12 studies that measured particular leadership dimensions. This analysis revealed leadership practices that provided indirect effects with varying, but certainly significant degrees of influence on student outcomes.

Through an inspection of the various survey items used to measure school leadership in their second meta-analysis, Robinson et al. (2008) inductively discovered five dimensions of leadership that seemed to suggest positive correlation with higher student outcomes. Those leadership principles that exhibited moderate effects were establishing goals and priorities; resourcing strategically; planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and curriculum, and ensuring an orderly and supportive environment. The researchers found strong average effects for the leadership dimension involving promoting and participating in teacher learning and development.

The integration of task and relational effectiveness was evident in this second analysis. For instance, the goals and expectations that provided a sense of purpose and priority were effective to the degree that the leader was effective in communicating those ideas to others in the organization and celebrating the successes of those who are accomplishing those benchmarks. Additionally, in higher performing schools, leaders were more likely to work directly with teachers to plan, coordinate, and evaluate teachers and teaching. Those leaders were participants as learners alongside the teachers, while often being viewed as a source of instructional advice because of their knowledge and accessibility. Leaders in high performing schools not only seem to build collegial teams through effective relationship management, but those relationships are utilized to focus staff efforts on very specific goals and pedagogical work. Robinson et al.(2008)

concluded that the more educational leaders focus on the core business of teaching and learning, the more likely they are to have a positive impact on students' outcomes.

Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008) provided a synthesis of international literature and, based upon the empirical evidence found during their study, presented a set of seven principles about contribute to successful school leadership. Four of those claims speak to the evidence of the significant positive influence of the principal on student learning. Leithwood et al. cited evidence from qualitative case study data, from quantitative studies of overall leader effects, the effectiveness of specific leadership practices, and leadership effects on student engagement, and from leadership succession research to assert that school leadership is second only to classroom instruction as an influence on pupil learning. The researchers asserted that successful leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment, and working conditions. The additional assertion that leadership is most effective when it is widely distributed seems to contradict the notion of significant headteacher or principal impact. However, the researchers cite evidence from a quantitative study which indicates that total leadership accounted for a significant 27% variation in student achievement across schools. Leithwood et al. find this compelling evidence for the impact of leadership within a school, especially when partnered with other findings that connect high achievement with high attribution of influence from leadership and studies that indicated headteachers were rated as having the greatest influence in schools.

Summary

Human behavior and interactions rarely reveal simple cause and effect relationships. Human beings are too complicated - their lives and decisions are influenced by myriad variables, none of which are alike to any two persons. Robinson et al. (2008) noted the relatively few studies that have focused on the questions of leadership impact on student outcomes and suggested that, by focusing on specific practices of leadership rather than leadership as a whole, one might discover a more accurate picture of the impact of effective leadership. Their meta-analysis revealed that the broad construct of transformational leadership provided weak to small indirect impacts on student outcomes, while instructional leadership provided mixed research results, with half of the studies revealing weak to small impacts and another half indicating strong impacts.

Other researchers, however, are quick to conclude that just because principals have not been shown to have strong direct effect on student outcomes, it does not follow that they do not have significant impact (Hipp, 1996, Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). Research has shown that principals are the driving force in articulating a vision and purpose within a group and in creating a culture of high expectations. Effective principals grow their teachers into leaders and foster collegiality and professional growth within their schools, while also positively impacting teacher motivation, commitment, and working conditions (Keedy & Simpson, 2002; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Lucas & Valentine, 2002, Robinson et al., 2008). These findings mirror the Kouzes and Posner (2002) exemplary practices of inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart and the commitments to envision the future, enlist others, foster collaboration, and recognize and appreciate contributions.

Though not addressed in this review, the impact of better teachers on student learning has been repeatedly shown (e.g., Ashton, Buhr & Crocker, 1984; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Guskey, 1987). It follows, therefore, that principals have a significant and vital impact on student achievement through the development and maintenance of empowered, energized teachers. Marzano et al.(2005) found that a strong correlation between leadership and student achievement exists and asserted that principals could have a profound impact on student achievement within their schools. Robinson et al. (2008) found that the principal behavior of promoting and participating in teacher learning and development did produce strong average effects across various studies.

The Search for a Paradigm of School Leadership

If it is established that principals can indeed impact their school environments, the next logical question to consider is “What does an effective principal look like?” Hallinger and Heck (1998) described two major models of leadership that have guided the development of leaders during the last quarter century. Though neither has been discarded as misguided, the current consensus is that both are simply insufficient alone to meet the educational needs of a rapidly changing world.

Hallinger and Heck (1998) conducted a review of empirical research conducted between 1980 and 1995 on principal leadership practices that impact school effectiveness. The researchers selected a body of 40 published journal articles, dissertation studies, and papers presented at peer-reviewed conferences based on three criteria. First, the studies must have been designed to measure principal leadership as an independent variable. Second, studies must have utilized some explicit measure of school performance as a dependent variable, usually in terms of student achievement. The

researchers also gave priority to studies that examined the principal's impact on teacher and student level variables as mediating factors. This focus on processes and outcomes led the researchers to examine quantitative studies. Third, the researchers sought to analyze studies across a diverse set of cultural contexts, thus including 11 studies from outside of the United States.

Hallinger and Heck (1998) classified their studies according to three theoretical models that have guided most of the research: (a) direct effects, (b) mediated effects, and (c) reciprocal effects. Studies employing the direct effects models proposed that the leader's practices can affect school outcomes and that those effects can be readily measured. These studies represented the norm for the first half of the period of study, but researchers were consistently unable to produce sound or consistent evidence of leadership on student outcomes. These studies offered little to the knowledge base concerning if and how leadership influences student outcomes, because they ignored other variables, which most likely operated in partnership with strong leadership practices.

The mediated effects framework provided consistent evidence of positive effects of principal leadership on school outcomes, because the framework operated under the proposition that leaders achieve their results primarily through other people. In other words, this model took into account that leadership is almost always mediated by events such as teacher commitment, instructional practices, and school culture. The reciprocal effects model, though rare and certainly more difficult to construct without considerable collection of longitudinal data, assumed that principals exerted influence, which produced

organizational change, which then provided feedback that caused reciprocal changes in leadership style and priority.

Though the studies represented in this review employed six distinctly different leadership frameworks, Hallinger and Heck (1998) discovered two major conceptual models that dominated the literature between 1980 and 1995. Prior to 1990, the principal as instructional leader conceptualization, drawn from the effective schools literature, was the norm. In fact, 31 of the 40 studies analyzed the principal's influence in terms of this model. The 1990s, however, ushered in the concept of transformational leadership, which mirrored the reform trends of empowerment, shared leadership, and organizational learning. Studies of this sort began to analyze the principal's ability to increase the organization's capacity to innovate. However, the reviewers were quite aware that the number of studies using the pre-1990s influence biased the study towards certain ways of viewing leadership effectiveness.

Hallinger and Heck (1998) concluded that the body of literature revealed four primary areas through which leadership may influence the organizational system. First, the most consistent findings were that principal involvement in shaping, selling, and sustaining the purposes and goals of the school represent an important area of indirect influence on school outcomes. Many studies revealed that through conveying high expectations and targeted staff selections, the principal can indirectly produce significant changes in self-expectations of staff and students and consequently produce positive results in student achievement.

Second, the core of various studies reviewed revealed that principals could assert significant influence on the organizational structures and social networks that constitute

the organizational system. Derived primarily from the frameworks studying transformational leadership, Hallinger and Heck (1998) discovered consistent findings that suggested principals could affect teachers' perceptions of school conditions positively, their commitment to school change, and their capacity for professional development. The reviewers also found cross-national support for the notion that higher involvement from a variety of stakeholders in decision making is characteristic of higher producing schools.

Closely related to this idea was the notion proposed from the review (Hallinger & Heck, 1998) that principal influence was significant as it related to "people effects." The literature suggested, as would be expected, that successful organizations possess a greater social cohesion and commitment to school goals. Studies revealed that principals were able to positively impact these interactions through fostering group goals, modeling desired behaviors, providing intellectual stimulation, and offering individualized support. Successful principals were described as more approachable, more supportive, more open, and more apt to engage in regular public recognition and praise.

Finally, Hallinger and Heck (1998) concluded that effective principals focused their efforts on developing shared meanings and values that define the culture of the school. Though supported less empirically than the other three characteristics, the reviewers found a significant commitment by principals to improve communication processes, foster high expectations for students and teachers, and increase morale. These efforts were targeted at creating a deeper set of core values and beliefs that served as a primary guiding force for positive change.

In their meta-analysis of findings from 27 studies of the relationship between leadership and student outcomes that were published between 1978 and 2006, Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) noted that leaders' impact on student outcomes are most effectively examined by focusing on types of leadership and particular leadership practices, rather than merely treating leadership as a unitary construct. In the relatively few studies specific to their research parameters, the authors outlined two primary types of leadership practice for which studies had been conducted. They noted that "instructional leadership" traced its empirical origins in studies in the late 1970's and early 80's in schools where students succeeded despite difficult challenges and focused almost exclusively on the role of the principal in school leadership. The components of this type of leadership involved principles of a disruption-free climate of learning, systems of clear teaching objectives, and high teacher expectations for students.

The second type of leadership found in these studies of leadership and student outcomes by Robinson et al.(2008) was transformational leadership, which was first articulated in Burns (1978) study that analyzed the abilities of some leaders to inspire new levels of energy, commitment, and moral purpose. That focus of energy and commitment around a common vision seemed to propel certain organizations through increased capacity for collaboration, overcoming challenges, and reaching significant goals. These researchers noted small, indirect influences on student outcomes in most research of instructional and transformational leadership styles but cautioned that none of the studies involved a calculation of effect size statistics, which could perhaps reveal a more accurate picture of leadership effects within a school.

Many researchers feel that “change” is the key term that will define the schools of the 21st Century. Therefore, new paradigms are rising that embrace a leadership picture that reflects the fluid characteristic of our society. Fullan (2002) drew upon his previous work and the research of others to outline the characteristics of a successful “cultural change principal” which he felt was necessary to produce sustained student achievement in our rapidly changing environment. He suggested that the current educational landscape requires that administrators cultivate leaders from many levels within the organization, which means that principals mobilize the energy and capacity of teachers. More than just being persons of palpable energy, enthusiasm, and hope, Fullan championed the need for cultural change principals who possess five essential components.

First, they are driven by a moral purpose and a belief that they can make a difference in the lives of students. Student learning is paramount to these individuals, and they are committed to closing the gap between high-performing and low-performing students. Second, cultural change principals understand the change process. These persons do not necessarily want to innovate the most, but rather innovate selectively with coherence. They provide opportunities for people to visit sites using new ideas, and they encourage questions and dissent. Yet, they consciously and consistently rally their faculties around their overarching goals.

Third, change leaders are skilled at building relationships (Fullan, 2002). As change occurs, comfort levels are disturbed, and people can easily become protective and suspicious. The successful change agent focuses energy on re-enlisting disaffected teachers and forging relationships between otherwise disconnected teachers. Fourth, cultural change principals create environments for creating and sharing knowledge.

Leaders have access to an abundance of information today, but it only becomes knowledge through a social process. The successful principal is the lead learner in an organization that embraces action research and information exchange.

Finally, the cultural change principals are skilled at coherence making. It is quite easy to generate overload and fragmentation as the glut of information and innovations take place. Principals must be attuned to the danger of seeking so many external innovations that they take on too many projects. They keep a central goal and strive to ensure that their faculties' energies remain focused on producing higher student achievement (Fullan, 2002).

Summary

The principal's role in education has evolved exponentially in the past 3 decades. The image of the paddle-carrying, check-writing, schedule-making administrator vanished in the reform movement of the 1990s. The dominant paradigm during the last two decades of the 20th Century would be that of the principal as instructional leader. The accountability movement opened our eyes to the necessity of evaluating and improving the instructional program of our schools. This model called on principals to leave the comforts of their offices, to be active in the evaluation and development of their faculties, and in many ways to be the "expert" in their building (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Robinson et al., 2008).

It became increasingly clear, however, that principals simply were not capable of shouldering that burden alone. The rapidly changing world that awaited students required that educators prepare students for the myriad tasks they would have to perform simply to survive. This challenge required more intellectual capital than a single leader could

produce. Therefore, the call rang out for transformational leaders that could foster leader and idea development within their organizations. In this model, the leaders' primary responsibility became developing and propagating a compelling vision that could energize their faculties to innovate and take risks. The transformational leader developed structures which welcomed input for decision making from many sources and fostered collaboration and collegiality within their schools (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Robinson et al., 2008). These components of transformational leadership correspond with the Kouzes and Posner (2002) practices of challenging the process and enabling others to act. More specifically, these are the commitments of searching for opportunities, experimenting and taking risks, fostering collaboration, and strengthening others.

Some, however, believed that neither paradigm was sufficient to capture the essence of today's effective principal. The instructional leader was perhaps too narrowly focused, while the transformational leader was too removed from where "the rubber hits the road" to really lead in a meaningful way. The notion of integrated leadership arose to meld the necessary components of both models (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). The most descriptive word, however, for some for today's educational setting is "change." Rather than trying to define an effective school, they are concentrating on effective cultures that are producing quality schools that look very different in varied contexts. These leaders, accordingly, must create structures that have the capacity for rapid and radical change to maintain viability in our technology-driven environment (Fullan, 2002), a behavior that corresponds with Kouzes and Posner's (2002) call to search for opportunities to incorporate innovations, creativity, and fresh ideas.

The Attributes of the Successful School Leader

Certainly, no one would argue that some are better suited than others for positions of leadership. Though many may aspire to positions of leadership and may well embrace the sound theoretical composition of a leader, many have sought to determine if there were specific personality traits that contributed to the success of certain principals. Though there are no perfect leaders who possess all the “right” qualities, researchers have contributed lists of characteristics that should be given consideration based upon the particular context.

Kirby, Paradise, and King (1992) conducted two studies to investigate specific leader attitudes and behaviors that their followers associate with organizational effectiveness. The qualitative study was designed to determine which behaviors were best able to predict follower satisfaction and leader effectiveness. The researchers sampled a separate group of educators ($N = 58$) from 15 districts in one southern state enrolled in an introductory graduate class in school leadership. The researchers asked participants to think of an extraordinary leader in education with whom they had worked and to describe in detail an event in which they had participated that best exemplified that person’s leadership. After the narrative was completed, the subjects responded to Likert-scale items assessing how difficult it was to identify an extraordinary leader in education, how effective the selected leader was in accomplishing goals, how satisfied employees were to work for this leader, and how extraordinary they perceived the leader to be. Only 9 of the 58 students stated they had no difficulty identifying an extraordinary leader and rated the leader highest on all other questions. The nine leaders described by these students comprised the sample ($n = 9$) for further analysis. The researchers analyzed the nine

narratives using constant comparative analysis to code data within and across categories to discover themes and patterns of behaviors which were ascribed to extraordinary leaders.

The results provided specific data regarding characteristics of extraordinary leaders. The participants ascribed to the extraordinary leaders people-orientation, knowledge through experience, optimism, the ability to inspire extra effort, modeling, communication of expectations, challenging the status quo, involvement of influential participants, an emphasis on training and development, and an unusual commitment. One particularly unique finding was that these extraordinary leaders held strong beliefs in intrinsic rewards rather than contingent rewards. The narrative data, according to the researchers, indicated that elements of charismatic leadership that elicit positive follower reactions could be the unusual levels of commitment possessed by the extraordinary leaders and the unshakeable commitment to a vision.

Koehler, Wallbrown, and Konnert (1994) examined how the Kouzes-Posner leadership model (1987) and the Gough personality assessment (1957) model were related to secondary principals in Christian schools. The researchers randomly selected 25 schools ($n = 25$) from a group of 443 ($N = 443$) educational institutions listed in *The Association of Christian Schools International Membership Directory*, published by the largest organization of Christian schools. The participating schools all had an enrollment of at least 150 students in Grades 7 through 12. Each secondary principal completed the California Psychological Inventory – Revised and the Leadership Practices Inventory – Self. Nine randomly selected teachers ($n = 9$) from each school completed The Leadership Practices Inventory – Other. The means, standard deviations, and

intercorrelations provided the basic data for the study. The researchers conducted a forward stepwise regression procedure to examine the relationship between the 20 folk scales comprising the two instruments.

Results of the study indicated that principals who scored highly on transformational leadership seem to possess a variety of higher than average “people skills.” They could understand the attitudes and feelings of others, and they value fellowship, social contact, and social perception. They were perceptive and attuned to the needs of those around them. These leaders were approachable and possessed the ability to gain cooperation with others with whom they could share and sell their ideas. Followers perceived these leaders to be sincere, dependable, and trustworthy individuals; and, they tended to work better with those who were younger and less experienced.

The researchers found that transformational leaders were also described as people who challenged the organizational structures that strive to maintain the status quo. They were generally non-conformists who possessed a high degree of resiliency and industriousness in their endeavors. They were people who were willing to take risks, and they generally possessed a positive outlook on the future. These transformational principals possessed charisma and were often adept communicators who were able to attract followers to their causes (Koehler, Wallbrown, & Konnert, 1994).

Investigating the possibility that a relationship can be established and supported between creativity and leadership, Goertz (2000) studied the levels of certain creativity traits as they interplayed with variables under study. The researcher identified eight characteristics from a review of the literature that are identifying traits of creativity and sought to determine the presence of these variables as indicators of effective leadership.

Those eight variables are (a) passion for work, (b) independence, (c) goal setting, (d) originality, (e) flexibility, (f) wide range of interests, (g) intelligence, and (h) motivation. The participants in the study were four effective principals ($n = 4$) located in the Southwest that participated in the National Association of Secondary School Principals Assessment Center (NASSP) and achieved a score of 4.0 on the NASSP assessment, indicating they were “above average” administrators.

The researcher developed a questionnaire containing 47 items which measured the frequency of certain thoughts and feelings of the administrator on a 5-point Likert scale. Twenty-two principals who had participated in the NASSP assessment piloted the self-perception instrument and were given space to include comments about the questionnaire. A second sample of 22 NASSP trained administrators then tested a revised version of the questionnaire and was given space to comment on improvements to the final questionnaire. The researcher then analyzed the data for frequency of creative behavior using descriptive and inferential statistics. Additionally, Goertz (2000) developed an in-depth interview guide to utilize in 1- to 2-hour interviews with the four principals. These interviews allowed the researcher to probe for answers related to specific events and behaviors, which allowed the principals to elaborate upon their survey responses. A qualitative data matrix summarized the comments from the interviews and aided in coding the quotations according to the studied variables.

Findings indicated that each of these variables of creativity were present in the behaviors and personalities of the four effective principals. The researcher concluded that the creative leader of the future would be energetic, enthusiastic, confident, flexible, and purposeful. This leader will be willing to serve others, willing to try new things, and

willing to stand up for right. Primarily, however, Goertz (2000) suggested that the creative leader is an encourager and motivator of people who is able to mobilize followers in seeking a common goal.

Schmeider and Cairns (1998) studied principals and superintendents to determine which skills administrators need most to be successful on the job. The researchers surveyed 450 principals and 206 superintendents ($N = 656$) from California and compiled a list of 24 skills from those responses. The researchers focused on the 10 most popular responses and identified them as being most necessary: (a) having a vision with an understanding of the steps needed to achieve relevant goals, (b) demonstrating a desire to make significant difference in the lives of staff and students, (c) knowing how to evaluate staff, (d) understanding change and the fluid nature of leadership, (e) being aware of one's own biases, strengths, and weaknesses, (f) knowing how to facilitate and conduct group meetings, (g) portraying a sense of self-confidence, (h) assessing job responsibilities, (i) encouraging involvement by all stakeholders, and (j) knowing district and building ethical limits and balancing that with one's own professional values. The researchers called particular notice to the fact that 7 of these top 10 critical skills involve self-awareness, being able to strategically deploy themselves within the organization.

Tate (2003) explored the ways effective elementary school principals use their listening skills in conversations with their teachers to increase their school's effectiveness. Additionally, the researcher investigated teachers' perceptions of their effective principals' listening skills to better understand the impact those listening skills have on teachers and their work. Tate contacted three directors of elementary education and asked for nominations of principals who exhibited best practices and possessed

strong relationships with their faculties. From these nominations, the researcher selected six (three female and three male) elementary principals and conducted interviews with each of them ($n = 6$). Full-time faculty members for each of these principals completed a Likert survey, and the researcher interviewed one full-time teacher, who had worked for each principal for at least 1 year, about the listening skills of the principal ($n = 6$). The researcher coded the interviewed and analyzed categories and themes across those interviews, and descriptive statistics compiled from the survey data provided a more complete picture of the listening skills of the principals.

Not unexpectedly, all six principals considered themselves good leaders, and all characterized themselves as understanding and compassionate leaders. More telling, perhaps, was the fact that all six teachers described their principals as having open-door policies and that their respective principals listened to the concerns of teachers in their buildings. Five of the six teachers described their leaders as caring and compassionate, and the same number stated that they collaborated with their principals on decisions that affected the school. These listening skills aided the principals in building trust relationships with their faculties, keeping abreast of the activities occurring within their buildings, and gaining input for decision-making. Though each of the interviewed teachers expressed a satisfaction that their respective principals were adequately informed and exhibited adequate empathy and concern about them personally, each of the six principals lamented the lack of time they felt they possessed to adequately listen to teachers, parents, and students. Tate (2003) emphasized that these effective principals were compassionate. They understood that teachers work hard, can often feel lonely and isolated, and need positive attention and praise.

Seeking to discover the reasons why principals lose their jobs, Davis (1998) synthesized the findings from a study that he conducted by surveying 200 California superintendents. Stated in terms of this particular study, the researcher arrived at characteristics of effective principals by contrasting them to those who had been considered ineffective. Davis discovered that the vast majority of superintendents stated that most principals lost their jobs because they lacked people skills. No other factor – including low student achievement, lack of discipline, poor administrative skills, or poor decision making – came close to the importance of interpersonal relationships in the eyes of superintendents. Effective principals, then, should possess a genuine interest in, and awareness of, the needs of their faculties, students, and communities. Davis suggested that effective leaders understand they must manage the perceptions of people, and they do not become too engrossed in the day-to-day activities to fail to notice how their behaviors are being perceived by those with whom they work and to whom they are accountable.

Larhi (2003) studied (a) the impact of motivation on the role relationship of principals, (b) the ways that leadership styles contribute to the success of secondary school principals, and (c) the factors that contribute to the professional development of secondary school principals. The participants in the study comprised a purposive sample of 20 ($n = 20$) secondary school principals described by their superintendents and by district criteria as “exemplary educators.” Utilizing a qualitative research design, the researcher gathered data through individual interviews with the principals and analyzed data across subjects to discover emerging themes.

Results of the study indicated that successful principals were visionary instructional leaders who promoted student learning. These principals also prioritized

support for their teachers and fostered collaboration among their staffs. Larhi (2003) described these leaders as self-confident, highly motivated, and possessing a commitment to networking with other colleagues and with community partners to further their personal professional development.

Understanding that even a high correlation between principal leadership and student achievement at a general “leadership” level provided little in the way of practical direction, Marzano et al.(2005) identified 21 specific responsibilities of the school leader that correlated with student achievement at levels between .18 and .33. Though listed as actions, at least 8 of the 21 responsibilities could be viewed as who the leader is, perhaps more than what the leader does. Those attributes of the leader that correlate with student outcomes are the leader’s a) disposition to challenge the status quo as a change agent, b) ability to establish strong lines of communication, c) flexibility within given situations and ability to cope with dissent, d) operation from a strong set of ideals and beliefs, e) optimism and ability to inspire others, f) skillfulness at developing relationships with staff and students, g) growing personally in the knowledge of curricular, instructional, and assessment best practices; and h) situational awareness that enables him or her to practice anticipatory leadership. Situational awareness, in fact, exhibits the highest correlation of the 21 responsibilities with a .33 coefficient.

Leithwood et al. (2008) also noted from their examination of studies of successful school leaders that the high proportion of variation in the effectiveness of the different leaders was generally explained by a small number of personal traits which were evident in the successful headteachers. According to the researchers, these traits replicate evidence from research on successful private sector leaders. The personal attributes that

seemed to be most beneficial to these leaders were an open-mindedness and willingness to learn from others, flexibility in thinking, resiliency, optimism, and persistence in pursuit of high expectations, motivation, commitment, and achievement for all.

Summary

This review of attributes of effective leaders could be discouraging for those yearning for guidance in finding a leader for their school, and even more disheartening for those aspiring to be administrators. Honest evaluation would lead most people to realize that no single person could honestly be considered gifted in even half of the attributes covered in this review. This highlights the need for organizations to understand their own particular contexts to see which attributes are most necessary for their leader.

Research suggests that some common attributes, however, do seem to arise most often in these laundry lists of character traits of effective principals. Most researchers agree that extraordinary leaders possess a contagious passion for their work—an unusual level of commitment to a higher purpose (Goertz, 2000; Larhi, 2003; Schneider & Carns, 1998). Extraordinary school leaders almost always seem to have quality people skills (Davis, 1998; Kirby, Paradise, & King, 1992; Koehler, Wallbrown, & Konnert, 1994; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). They care about people and exude empathy for those around them. These effective leaders devote time and energy to developing and maintaining relationships within their organizations, so that many people will participate in the processes of improvement, including their personal commitment to learning from others (Larhi, 2003; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Schneider & Carns, 1998; Tate, 2003). These attributes reinforce the Kouzes and Posner (2002) practices of challenging the process and enabling others to act by

searching for opportunities, fostering collaboration and strengthening others. People trust them because they walk their talk, and their teachers and students believe they are concerned about their needs and will support them (Davis, 1998; Koehler et al., 1994). Kouzes and Posner's (2002) practice modeling the way by setting the example agrees with this notion. Effective principals are also effective communicators. They are persistent optimists about the future of their organizations who are able to enlist others in their causes, while exhibiting flexibility and adaptability to changing circumstances with the school (Kirby et al., 1992; Koehler et al., 1994; Leithwood et al., 2008; Marzano et al., 2005). This corresponds to Kouzes and Posner's (2002) practice of inspiring a shared vision by envisioning the future and enlisting others.

Overt Behaviors that Contribute to Student Success

The necessity to produce student success in schools across the country requires, however, that more than just a select cadre of leaders be developed from among those containing a specific number of the aforementioned character traits. The literature overwhelmingly reveals that there are specific behaviors in which successful leaders engage with regularity and from priority. It is in discovering those actions which are most reproducible that researchers have perhaps contributed most to the efforts of school productivity and effectiveness.

Bennis and Nanus (1985) were among the first to propose a set of priorities that guide a great majority of successful leaders. Their list of priorities included (a) attention through vision, (b) developing meaning through communication, (c) building trust through positioning, and (d) the strategic development and deployment of self. These were broad categories with certainly very different contextual meanings; yet, they

provided a framework for a leader to engage himself or herself in activities that transcend simple maintenance of an efficient daily routine, and these ideas were certainly influential as school systems began serious study on effective leadership. Bennis and Nanus began the call for “transformative leadership,” for a leader “who commits people to action, who converts followers into leaders, and who may convert leaders into agents of change” (p. 3).

Kouzes and Posner (1995) identified four ways in which managers can empower their staffs and increase productivity in an organization. These authors suggested that managers must first develop a culture of reciprocity of influence by allowing their employees to use their abilities in meaningful ways, thus growing a deeper commitment on the part of employees and a shared ownership of responsibility. Second, managers can increase their employees’ abilities to utilize their judgment and respond with appropriate action by providing greater decision-making authority and responsibility for their employees. Third, the researchers suggested that good managers invest in developing employee skills and competencies and place their workers at the center of critical problem solving. Finally, the authors suggest that effective managers must be highly visible and active in strengthening networks between employees, especially fostering communication between people outside of individual departments and across the organization in order that people will assist and support one another in attaining organizational goals.

Drawing primarily from lessons learned in the Continental Airlines and New York City police department turnarounds that occurred in the 1990s, and having reviewed dozens of studies in a wide range of organizations, Hassel and Hassel (2009) provided a

picture of common actions that spurred dramatic improvement, believing that these actions hold promise for school turnaround. The essential precursor for these leaders, according to the authors, is to operate in an environment of the “big yes,” a clear nod of support from the top in support of dramatic change. The authors suggested that turnaround leaders should first focus on a few high priority goals with visible pay-offs and early success to gain momentum. Second, successful leaders should break organizational rules and norms in order to demonstrate that new action gets new results. Third, these leaders push a fast cycle of trying new tactics, discarding failed tactics, and providing energy and resources in things that work. Fourth, successful change agents often replace key leaders to help organize and drive the change, while communicating for all staff that change is mandatory, not optional. Next, the leaders conduct rigorous analysis of data and require all staff to own their data in an open-air forum and face tough questions about the results. Finally, turnaround leaders manage the change process by motivating and maneuvering, communicating a positive vision for success, helping staff connect with the customers’ perspectives, working through influencers, and championing the early wins.

Also drawing from non-educational setting leadership studies, Murphy (2010) concluded that leadership is so crucial that virtually no turnaround occurs without a change in leadership. Once in place, the leaders should act quickly to create a sense of urgency to address deficiencies. When motivated properly to address the maladies of the current situation, the initial phases of turnaround involve an accurate diagnosis by analyzing data and causes for decline, emphasizing efficiency and targeted work, centralizing operations, concentrating on substance rather than structure, and focusing on

the strengths of the organization as well as the needs of the customers. Finally, the author suggested that leaders should focus on activities that will have quick impact while imparting a new, hopeful vision for the organization.

Wendel, Hoke, and Joekel (1993) conducted a study of outstanding school administrators to discover personal perceptions of why these individuals believe they are identified as successful. Specifically, the researchers asked the individuals “Please tell us why you are considered to be an outstanding administrator.” The research group contacted officials from educational institutions, professional organizations, and universities for names of outstanding administrators. They then wrote to all of the more than 1,000 nominated individuals and invited them to participate in their research. Eventually, 491 administrators submitted usable responses, 89 ($n = 89$) of whom were high school principals. Their responses provided the data which were subsequently compiled and organized into 11 factors that contributed to the professional success of these individuals. Those factors, presented and supported with actual participant quotations, were (a) hard work, (b) putting students first, (c) high expectations, (d) community outreach, (e) positive staff relationships, (f) professional growth, (g) clear personal philosophy, (h) risk taking, (i) effective communication, (j) vision setting, and (k) collaborative leadership. Though based upon data collected at the very beginning of the school reform movement, this study reflected outcomes which agree with the findings of more recent studies and certainly of the philosophy that guided much of the reform movement of the 1990s.

Throughout the 1990’s Leithwood was an advocate for the development of transformational leadership in school systems and has been active in research about the

implementation of this paradigm of leadership. Leithwood (1992) summarized the results of three studies that he and research colleagues had completed that were designed to explore the meaning and utility of transformational leadership in schools. The researchers studied schools that were initiating reforms of their own choice as well as schools responding to both district- and state-level initiatives. The summarized results of the studies suggest that transformational leaders are generally in continuous pursuit of three fundamental goals: (a) helping staff members develop and maintain a collaborative, professional school culture; (b) fostering teacher development, and (c) improving group problem-solving capacity. Leithwood suggested that these principals helped develop norms of collective responsibility and continuous improvement, internalized goals for professional growth, and created processes for actively pursuing alternate and creative solutions to educational challenges.

As already noted, Hipp (1996) found that significant relationships existed between both general teacher efficacy and personal teacher efficacy and the principal behaviors of “models behavior” and “provides contingent rewards.” Additionally, the principal behavior of “inspires group purpose” held significant relationship to GTE. Interview data across the schools represented in that study confirmed survey results and added eight principal leadership behaviors that reinforce and sustain teacher efficacy: (a) provides personal and professional support, (b) promotes teacher empowerment and decision making, (c) manages student behavior, (d) creates a positive climate for success, (e) fosters teamwork and collaboration, (f) encourages innovation and continual growth, (g) believes in staff and students, and (h) inspires caring and respectful relationships

Barth (2002) called changing the prevailing culture of a school probably the most important and most difficult job of an instructional leader. The culture of the school can, in no uncertain terms, either support the innovations necessary to create an environment of lifelong learners or it can sabotage all positive efforts. The instructional leader must understand that all school cultures are incredibly resistant to change, but the principal must decide to disempower the elements of teachers' lounge conversations and back hall alliances by creating structures that allow open, constructive dialogue about meaningful issues.

Barth (2002) outlined three primary characteristics of the leader who will change the school's culture in a positive way. First, he suggested that the primary force behind such change is a clear, personal vision of creating a human learning environment. This must go beyond a beginning of the year "pep talk"; rather, the leader must convey a moral outrage at ineffective practices and a commitment to discovering and implementing structures that foster achievement.

Second, he called attention to the often-used "community of learners" assertion contained in so many mission statements, and he noted that culture builders will understand that the first step of that journey is to create community. To create community means that the school will be the focal point of educators, staffs, parents, and students who genuinely care about and encourage one another. The instructional leader must help build and maintain relationships that can withstand conflict and disagreement and celebrate one another's successes.

Finally, Barth (2002) asserted that instructional leaders must find ways to uncouple learning and punishment that our current system breeds. He proposed that "the

trellis of our profession – and the most crucial element of school culture – is the ethos hospitable to human learning” (p. 8). The effective instructional leader embraces the opportunity to continue his or her own professional development, develops structures for faculties to be renewed and energized by their own sharpening of their swords, and ultimately produces students who desire to contribute to burgeoning knowledge base of our society.

In blunt terms, Fried (1999) proposed that if a school’s culture does not change, the school will not change. Therefore, he asserted that leaders seeking to improve the effectiveness of their academic programs ought to devote energy to transforming their cultures. He offered a list of seven key habits that leaders seeking such a change must embrace. Fried’s list includes (a) articulating a clear vision, (b) practicing respect and empathy for faculties and staff, (c) fostering authentic conversation about meaningful issues, (d) nurturing faculty collegiality, (e) focusing on student performance, (f) embracing self-assessment and accountability, and (g) promoting a reflective environment that allows people within the school to think “outside the box.”

Gleaning from other cultures, a recent study by Sharifah and Samsilah (2009) indicates that effective principals have been able to turn around “at-risk schools” by paying primary attention to the culture of their schools, improving the climate by changing the way others think and by serving as role models of the behaviors and priorities they desire. Through a qualitative study of two schools, utilizing interviews, document analysis, and observation, the researchers discovered that these principals were brave, creative, and persistent and were willing, if necessary in transforming their schools, to go against common practices and policies. These principals focused attention

on six key areas of concern. They strived to meet the needs and connect to the interests of the students; to build, sell, and promote a new image of the school's purpose, values, and benefits for the students; to transform the physical environment; to celebrate successes regularly; to increase parental involvement; and, to address the remediation needs of their populations.

Proposing that the work of researchers supports the notion that transformational leadership was well-suited to meet the needs of the multi-cultural settings facing many of our schools, Jason (2000) believed that three central tenets gleaned from empirical research in this field can be particularly helpful in meeting the challenges of diverse populations—tenets that seem to mirror the findings of those studying turnaround leadership.

First, Jason (2000) proposed that effective principals must maintain high expectations of performance and professional growth for themselves and their staffs. The transformational leader must promote a “communal sense of self-efficacy,” whereby the principal promotes problem solving, publicizes successes, praises initiative, and provides institutional support for group initiatives. The principal should be committed to action research, whereby the organization as a whole obtains data and information regarding a problem and evaluates and implements appropriate remedial actions. The effective leader encourages a staff to rethink how their work can be performed more effectively and serves as a source of information and new ideas.

Jason (2000) concluded that an essential finding of the research was that transformational leaders must foster collaboration within their faculties and staffs. The principal must seek to provide opportunities where individuals are encouraged to present

their positions, and those positions contribute to a dialogue, which helps the groups to discover insights they could not reach operating in isolation. The effective principal is attuned to the dysfunctionality of working in isolation. Discovering the different perceptions of needs and solutions is a priority for these leaders.

Finally, the effective principal in a multi-cultural setting is committed to developing a pursuit of a common purpose. Jason (2000) suggested that homogeneity of thought is not the goal of the leader, but rather the effective leader will embrace the different opinions as an avenue through which the varied needs of the group can be discovered and met. The effective principal will, however, develop a common commitment to teaching and learning and will find a consensus around the instructional focus of the organization. In other words, the researcher proposed that the transformational leader is able to keep the organization focused on their common goals and purposes, rather than their common differences.

Liontos (1993) conducted a case study of a successful principal in an Oregon high school to discern and present key behaviors and priorities of a successful school leader. The researcher interviewed the principal, school staff, and the superintendent of the principal selected. Additionally, the researcher sought to study a principal who (a) utilized a collaborative, shared decision-making approach; (b) prioritized teacher professionalism and empowerment; (c) possessed an understanding of organizational and individual change; and (d) desired continual improvement. The researcher apparently was seeking a real-life example of someone who was successfully implementing the reform agenda ushered in during the 1990s. The principal participated in regular one-on-one, semi-structured interviews as well as impromptu informal interviews during the

observation period so the researcher could gather information regarding the reasons for specific actions. The researcher's interview and observation notes provided data regarding behaviors and priorities which were in turn compared to the responses given during informal interviews by faculty and staff that work with and for this principal.

When Lontos (1993) asked at the outset what he credited as reasons for his success or what he would consider the priorities of a transformational leader, the selected principal listed five: (a) building a collaborative team, (b) understanding the big picture, (c) empowering staff as leaders, (d) implementing shared decision making, and (e) emphasizing continual growth and improvement. Though not included in his list, the principal added that it was essential to create a safe environment for risk-taking. His track record of accomplishment bore out evidence of behaviors that reflected these priorities. He developed flexible roles within his administrative team, spent great energies to arrive at consensus, often withheld his opinion (even to the disgust of some teachers) so that his staff would develop problem-solving capabilities and would not stop thinking, worked to reduce teacher isolation, and he exhibited a sincere openness for persons to disagree with him. He placed a great emphasis on grant writing, believing that it provided great opportunities for his staff to be innovative and continue their own self-development. He also prioritized reading and research as the guide for student improvement, believing it was his duty to circulate research, network with other successful professionals, and be active in attending conferences.

Those working with the effective principal described him as warm and caring, approachable and unassuming, conscientious, hard-working and dedicated. They credited him with being a good listener who practiced nurturing, empathetic, and intuitive

behaviors. The teachers appreciated his desire to share the spotlight, indicating that he had no interest in taking credit for school accomplishments. Many described him as a coach who possessed no need to be controlling or directive, and most agreed that he modeled regularly the behaviors he desired others to emulate.

Railsback, Reed, and Boss (2001) and other laboratory staff members of the Northwest Regional Educational Lab (NWREL) conducted a series of case studies of Title I schools in the Northwest United States that have made significant progress toward improving student achievement and bringing organizational change. The researchers asked state department of education staff members from six northwestern states to recommend Title I schools that had marked performance improvement in the previous 3 years. NWREL staff members contacted school administrators to ask what specific strategies they had used to achieve success. They also mined the documents for school-wide plans, goal statements, achievement data, and other information and conducted on-site interviews and observations at some of the schools.

Through constant comparative analysis Railsback et al. (2001) arrived at seven strategies for school improvement that were practiced in these schools, several of which are prevalent in turnaround leadership literature as well. The strategies gleaned from the data were (a) creating a clear, shared vision with attainable goals; (b) creating a learning community; (c) creating a positive, supportive, and safe school culture; (d) providing effective, collaborative leadership; (e) making effective use of resources; (f) using data to drive reform; and (g) involving parents and community.

Perhaps recognizing the growing connection to the tenets of transformational leadership, Fullan (2006) utilized the title *Turnaround Leadership* to describe the role

school leaders should play as part of system transformation. The work does not outline a specific research study, but rather the insights gleaned from his work as an international consultant on educational reform, as chair of a team that conducted a 4-year assessment of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy in England, and as special advisor to the premier and minister of education in Ontario. His primary task in the Canadian province was to help design and implement reform in all 4,000 elementary schools in all 72 districts, as well as helping form partnerships with multiple entities to accomplish this goal. For him, “the real reform agenda is societal development” (p. 1). Noting that developed countries with larger education gaps are also those with the higher income differentials, he asserted that public education must primarily engage in “gap closing” if they are to overcome the barriers to learning inherent in the direct health and indirect psychological consequences of poverty.

The author contended that meaningful reform must begin with an understanding of the emotions generated by societal conditions, and thus discovering how those emotions may prompt motivation within large groups of people to engage in change. The entire reform strategy, according to Fullan, is to focus relentlessly on internal accountability and capacity building. When massive resources are utilized in building the collective efficacy of those in direct contact with students, teachers will feel as if they are a source of the solution and will develop an intrinsic commitment to lend their ideas and energy to collectively enact meaningful improvement.

With those two primary foci, Fullan (2006) proposes 10 key elements of successful change: (a) define closing the gap as the overarching goal; (b) attend initially to the three basics – literacy, numeracy, and well-being of students; (c) tap into teachers’

and students' dignity and sense of respect; (d) ensure that the best people are working on the problem; (e) change by doing rather than by elaborate planning; (f) assume that lack of capacity is the initial problem and work on it continuously; (g) stay the course through continuity of good direction by leveraging leadership; (h) build internal accountability linked to external accountability; (i) establish conditions for the evolution of positive peer pressure; and (j) use previous strategies to build public confidence. These are not the actions of a single leader, but rather the product of successful collaboration fostered where little existed before the turnaround process began. The principal's role, however, must be that of modeling the new values and behaviors that are intended to replace the existing norms and in becoming a leaders of leaders in order to improve the quality of instruction with the school.

Marzano et al. (2005) offered 13 other leader responsibilities that reflect intentional actions from the principal. Those actions include: a) publicly affirming successes and acknowledging failures; b) offering contingent rewards by recognizing and rewarding individual accomplishments; c) building culture by emphasizing values and beliefs; d) creating a disciplined environment with structures and procedures to protect instructional time; e) establishing focus on clear goals; f) gathering input by involving teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies; g) providing intellectual stimulation for faculty and staff with exposure to the most current theories and practices regarding effective schooling; h) engaging in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment; i) monitoring, evaluating, and providing feedback of school practices; j) establishing standard operating principles and routines; k) reaching out and advocating for the school to all stakeholders; l) providing

teachers with necessary resources for the successful execution of their duties; and m) developing visibility through interactions with teachers, students, and parents.

To further examine the relationship of these 21 responsibilities, Marzano et al. (2005) conducted a factor analysis using the responses of a questionnaire designed to measure a principal's behavior. The researchers discovered that two traits seemed to guide the implementation of the correlative behaviors. First order change describes the incremental change within a school that is the next logical step in a transformation. Second order change refers to the dramatic departure from the expected in terms of defining the problem and finding a solution, as in the case of a school in need of turnaround. The day to day operation of the school, and the necessary first order improvements, requires some leader attention to all 21 responsibilities. However, second order change requires specific skill and attention at seven of the responsibilities: a) possessing knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment; b) functioning as an optimizer; c) providing intellectual stimulation; d) acting as a change agent; e) monitoring and evaluating; f) possessing flexibility; and g) operating from strong ideals and beliefs. During a second order change process, the leader might have to endure the perception of decline in areas of culture, communication, order, and input.

Marzano et al. (2005) further found that it was crucial that leaders and staffs engage in the right work that is needed for that particular school. Various factors influence what works in schools. School-level factors include a guaranteed and viable curriculum, challenging goals and effective feedback, parent and community involvement, safe and orderly environment, and collegiality and professionalism. Teacher-level factors include instructional strategies, classroom management, and

classroom curriculum design. Student-level factors include the home environment, learned intelligence and background knowledge, and motivation.

Finally, Marzano et al. (2005) offered a five-step action process for enhancing student achievement. These actions of the leader include a) developing a strong leadership team, b) distributing some responsibilities throughout that team, c) selecting the right work for the school, d) identifying the order of magnitude implied by the selected work, and e) matching the management style to the order of the magnitude of the change initiative.

Leithwood and Strauss (2009) studied schools in Ontario to test their beliefs that school turnaround processes unfold in stages within which successful leadership practices are enacted to prompt change on the part of teachers, and ultimately produce increased student performance. The study was carried out in two stages. The first involved the collection of interview data from 73 ($N=73$) interviews, as well as eight parent and eight student focus groups from four elementary and four secondary schools. The schools were selected based upon their successful performance over three years on achievement tests in grades 3 and 6, as well as the grade 10 literacy test. In the second stage, the researchers distributed surveys to 472 teachers and 36 administrators in 11 elementary and three secondary schools. Nine of those schools met the criteria as “turnarounds” and five were “improving.”

The synthesis of these studies produced eight key findings, all but one revolving around the application of four “core leadership practices” that are essential to success. Those four practices are broadly described as a) direction setting, b) developing people, c) redesigning the organization, and 4) managing the instructional program. The

respondents identified other key behaviors that contribute to the successful implementation of those practices, including providing resources, building a collaborative culture, providing adequate professional development, developing shared goals, and establishing high performance expectations and effective channels of communication.

The additional finding that was not directly connected to the application of the “core” principles was that leaders turn their schools around by changing teacher attitudes and school cultures. That transformation involves developing school wide responsibility for student success by embracing the ability of all students to learn with appropriate instruction that can be learned and by refusing to accept students’ family backgrounds as insurmountable obstacles to student achievement.

Also exploring the terminology of “turnaround leadership” that is becoming more prevalent in educational literature, Leithwood, Harris, and Strauss (2010) began with a fundamental belief that successful turnaround schools almost always have a good principal. Their mixed method, two-phase study sought not to estimate how much leadership mattered but rather to discover the practices and behaviors which successful turnaround leaders exercise. The first phase of the study incorporated qualitative techniques in one elementary and one secondary school in each of four districts from the Ontario Ministry of Education’s school Turnaround Teams Project in order to generate theory about core leadership practices in turnaround schools. Phase 2 of the study involved a quantitative analysis of a survey distributed to 340 ($N=340$) teachers and 20 ($N=20$) principals or vice principals from 20 turnaround schools and 288 ($N=288$) teachers and 24 ($N=24$) administrators from improving schools. The researchers utilized semi-structured interviews with an average of ten administrators and teachers from each

school in phase 1. They also conducted focus group interviews with parents as well as a group of four to six students in each school. The researchers also utilized data from a qualitative study, utilizing case study methodology, in the United Kingdom of 20 ($N=20$) schools that had moved from the lowest quartile of added value in students to the highest level in a five-year period. The research team conducted semi-structured interviews with a wide range of stakeholder groups in two-day visits to each school then developed and analyzed themes that emerged inductively both individually and with cross-case comparison.

Leithwood et al. (2010) concluded that almost all successful leaders utilize a common set of core practices in turning around a failing school. Those leaders a) create a shared sense of direction among members of the organization; b) develop the capacities of their teachers to meet existing needs; c) redesign school policies, procedures, cultures, and structures to support teachers in exercising those capacities; and d) manage the teaching and learning processes within the school.

The qualitative portion of the study provided these core practices provide general direction for those aspiring to lead turnaround within schools. However, Leithwood et al. (2010) found more specific guidance in the second phase of their study. According to their study, the turnaround leader creates a shared vision by establishing and modeling core organizational values, by establishing short-term goals and early wins, by creating high expectations, and by fostering communication with all stakeholders in the school. Turnaround leaders build the capacities of their teachers by providing individualized support for personal growth and intellectual stimulation for skill development.

Additionally, those leaders model desired practices and values including transparent decision making, confidence, optimism, and consistency between words and deeds.

According to Leithwood et al. (2010) successful turnaround leaders redesign their organizations by developing norms and values that encourage staffs to work collaboratively and reorganize the school so that collaboration is possible and likely. These leaders build productive educational cultures within families and encourage connections with other schools and stakeholders, while providing access to outside agencies that can aid in lowering barriers that hinder family support and student success. Finally, the researchers found that turnaround leaders improve their school's instructional program by recruiting and retaining competent teachers, by monitoring and using data about student learning to drive decision making and staff development, by buffering staff from distractions to their work with students, and by supporting the instructional work. That support is accomplished by supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating the curriculum, and providing resources in support of curriculum development, instructional practices, and student assessment.

Summary

While there are certain principal behaviors that are more effective in specific contexts than in others, certain themes emerged from this examination of literature and suggest that certain actions produce positive results cross-contextually. First, effective leaders have a clear vision for their organization, and they provide the primary fuel source to keep the train moving in that direction. They enlist others in that goal and generate enthusiasm about its benefits (Barth, 2002; Fried, 1999; Jason, 2000; Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010; Leithwood & Strauss, 2009; Marzano, Waters, &

McNulty, 2005; Railsback, Reed & Boss, 2001; Sharifah & Samsilah, 2009). These concepts even share almost identical terminology with Kouzes and Posner's (2002) practices of inspiring a shared vision by envisioning the future and enlisting others.

Second, that vision for effective principals is not static, rather it is focused on improvement. These leaders hold high expectations for themselves, for their staffs, and for their students. They model an appreciation for learning and they provide opportunities for faculties to grow from one another and from external sources. Learning is a community affair in turnaround schools (Barth, 2002; Fullan, 2006; Jason, 2000; Leithwood, 1992; Leithwood et al., 2010; Leithwood & Strauss, 2009; Lontos, 1993; Marzano et al., 2005; Railsback, et al., 2001; Wendell et al., 1993). These behaviors correspond with Kouzes and Posner's practices of challenging the process and enabling others to act. More specifically, these actions are part of the commitments to search for opportunities, experiment and take risks, foster collaboration, and strengthen others.

Third, effective principals communicate often and effectively, and consciously devote energies to building relationships and teams. As these leaders move their organizations, they understand that improvement means change, and change means discomfort. The trust they earn with their staffs and the flow of information they provide, however, can ease tensions and can keep the organization moving in positive directions (Barth, 2002; Fried, 1999; Fullan, 2006; Hipp, 1996; Leithwood, 1992; Leithwood et al., 2010; Leithwood & Strauss, 2009; Lontos, 1993, Sharifah & Samsilah, 2009), similar to Kouzes and Posner's (2002) call to a commitment to building trust by fostering collaboration.

Fourth, successful leaders create supportive environments which encourage collaboration and innovation. They create climates which encourage authentic conversation and questioning of the status quo, while communicating to the brave that failure is part of progress (Fried, 1999; Hassel & Hassel, 2009; Hipp, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2010; Marzano et al., 2005; Wendel et al., 1993). Again, the concept and terminology are almost identical to Kouzes and Posner's (2002) notion of challenging the process by searching for opportunities to incorporate innovations, creativity, and fresh ideas while encouraging experimenting and taking risks in order to learn from mistakes.

Finally, effective principals engage the collective intellectual capacity of the community, teachers, and students in decision making and school leadership. These leaders see themselves as facilitators, using their position to strategically position persons where they can be most effective and to focus the collective talents and energies around them to improve the instructional program of the school and promote higher student achievement (Hassel & Hassel, 2009; Jason, 2000; Kouzes & Posner, 1995; Leithwood et al., 2010; Lontos, 1993; Marzano et al., 2005; Railsback et al., 2001). Kouzes and Posner's (2002) practice of enabling others to act and challenging the process by strengthening others and searching for opportunities to incorporate improvements mirror these behaviors.

Turnaround Leadership in Church Settings

Evidence of Pastor Impact in Churches

That growing churches share many priorities in common is well-established. The questions with which this inquiry is concerned are the discovery of those consistent

behaviors and the degree to which those priorities are established as a function of pastoral leadership within turnaround congregations.

Barna (1993) studied congregations that had been thriving churches, then experienced a steep decline, but ultimately pulled out of the dive and became revitalized, to discover insights that might help turn around other declining churches or to prevent a major slide in a church that is presently strong. The author's research team selected a group of 30 turnaround churches in 16 states from recommendations of denominational representatives, turnaround churches, publishers, research and consulting groups, and other observers of the church scene. The group represented all geographic parts of the country, 14 different Protestant denominations, and attendance ranges from 135 to 3,300. The researchers contacted the pastors of those churches and conducted lengthy open-ended interviews of 1 to 2 hours with each of them. The pastors also provided documents that helped describe the revitalization process.

The researcher delineated what he called eleven elements of revival derived from his study. This list mixed both personal attributes and leadership strategies of the pastor, as well as actions by church leadership. That six of the eleven involve strong leadership and attributes of the pastor—(a) pastoral love of people, (b) releasing the past, (c) defining outreach, (d) equipping the congregation, (e) pastoral strong work ethic, and (f) quality sermons—and two more involve congregational actions related to the pastor—(a) select a new pastor and (b) select a strong leader—suggests that the role of the pastor in revitalization is significant. He also noted that a long-term pastoral commitment and unity within the congregation was essential to recovery.

Avery (2002) studied six congregations that had utilized an intentional interim minister to begin the work of healing and refocus to prepare a congregation to call and chart a new course under a settled pastorate. The researcher located five ministers who were members of the Interim Ministry Network and another who had been specifically trained for the interim role through another organization, and asked each of them to direct him to a congregation that had begun the turnaround process under an interim pastor. Avery utilized qualitative inquiry methods that included on-site interviews in a 4- to 5-week period at each site with the interim pastor, the settled pastor (where available), current staff, approximately 20 lay leaders at each site that were involved in the transition, and previous pastors and staff when afforded the opportunity. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. The researcher examined documents relating to church history, annual reports, newsletters, church council reports, correspondence, letters of resignation, congregation studies, and other items. Additionally, the inquiry included demographic studies of the surrounding areas of each church. The researcher studied the crisis in each church, its history, the role of the interim, and the leadership of the settled pastor, looking for common factors that contributed to either revitalization or decline and appraising future prospects of development or decline. The settled pastorate, in most cases, read the chapters written about their church by the researcher to ensure that factual information was correct.

The research findings indicated by way of counterexample the strong impact that pastoral leadership has upon a congregation. Specifically, Avery (2002) found that certain pastoral leadership choices, styles, and behaviors lead a congregation to a decline in mission and participation by members. The researcher found that mismatches between

the pastor and the parish in four of the six congregations sparked a crisis that led to instability within the congregation. Some of those behaviors involve a rigidity in the pastoral office and a lack of adaptability to the specific needs of the congregation, including a failure to develop meaningful relationships with members of the congregation. Pastors may lack management skills sufficient for the growing congregation, or they may lack the ability to manage conflict in a constructive way. While many researchers that will be noted later in this review have found that a long-term pastoral commitment to a congregation is generally necessary for sustained growth, Avery noted that long-term pastorates provide a series of challenges after the pastor leaves that become obstacles to revitalization. First, the congregation tends to find its identity in the pastor and his or her vision of ministry, leaving an initial vacuum of direction and identity upon the pastor's departure, as well as making it difficult for anyone to establish a credible presence within the church and community. Remaining staff members may be a source of conflict and hindrance as well, as allegiances may be tested and "protection of turf" may continue. According to the researcher, this affirms the critical importance of intentional interim pastors in beginning the work of revitalization without strings attached to a long term pastorate.

Rainer (2001) noted a fundamental flaw in most research aimed at discovering strategies to reach the unchurched population of the United States. Most of those studies questioned people who were not currently attending church. The problem was that previous research by Rainer had revealed that as many as 80-90 % of that population, despite the Church's best efforts, will never attend church. In seeking to correct this research flaw, Rainer's research group, interviewed 353 ($n = 353$) formerly unchurched

persons—representing seven different denominations plus independent churches—from 37 states in the continental United States, who typically became active in church within the past 2 years, to ascertain reasons for choosing the particular church in which they were involved. Those participants were nominated by leaders of congregations that met the criteria of “effective evangelistic churches”—churches which recorded at least 26 conversions per year and a membership to annual conversion ratio of less than 20:1. Less than 4 % of churches in America met this criteria. The research group also interviewed 350 ($n = 350$) “transfer churching” members who had moved from another church to become a part of the effective evangelistic church. Utilizing primarily telephone interviews and a series of “cluster questions,” the team discovered similarities and differences in the “unchurched” and “churched” in looking for a church home.

Rainer (2001) discovered that 90 % of the formerly unchurched listed the pastor and/or the pastor’s preaching as key in their entering the ranks of the churched in that particular congregation. Though the pastor was not directly associated with the unchurched attending the first time, the overwhelming majority credited the pastor as a reason for coming back for another visit. Somewhat surprising to the researcher was that the second most mentioned reason for selecting a particular church was the doctrinal beliefs of that body. In fact, when asked more directly if the doctrinal beliefs were important in selecting that church, 91 % of the unchurched and 89 % of the churched answered in the affirmative. No other factor was mentioned by more than 50 % of those surveyed.

The strong influence of pastors in moving unchurched people to active church participation prompted Rainer (2001) to discern the specific behaviors of the pastor that

contributed to their decisions. The most commonly mentioned action of the pastor was “preaching that teaches the Bible,” which was mentioned by 60 % of the formerly unchurched. This added clarity to the high correlation of persons mentioning the pastor and doctrine as reasons for choosing a church. These persons looked for doctrinal clarity that was centered in the authority of Scripture. They were seeking moral truth and found, in the pastors of “effective” churches, expository preaching with the ability to communicate that doctrine clearly. The second most mentioned behavior of the preacher (41 %) was “preaching that applies to my life.” The formerly unchurched not only wanted doctrinal clarity, but they also appreciated the ability of the pastor to make that doctrine relevant to their lives. The fifth and eighth most mentioned factors of pastoral influence were actions as well, a “personal contact by the pastor” (30 %) and a “pastor’s class” (25 %). These, in fact, might often be one in the same action.

Stetzer and Dodson (2007) conducted a study to discover principles from comeback churches that could guide other pastors and churches stuck in plateau or decline to experience revitalization in their congregations. The two, along with other researchers from the Center for Missional Research, contacted leaders from 40 Protestant denominations to identify churches that met their established criteria for a “comeback church,” which were (1) 5 years of plateau and/or decline since 1995, indicated by worship attendance growth less than 10 % in that 5-year period, and (2) the plateau or decline was followed by significant growth over the past 2 to 5 years as indicated by a membership to baptism (conversion) ratio of 35:1 or lower each year and at least a 10% increase in attendance each year. The research team ultimately conducted 324 phone surveys of church leaders from 10 denominations in 324 ($N = 324$) comeback churches.

The surveys asked for responses ranking the degree of effect upon revitalization of various factors using a 5-point Likert questionnaire, and the researchers conducted follow-up interviews for more information on specific topics. Responses in each category were totaled and divided by the number of respondents, giving each category a number ranking between 1.0 and 5.0. The categories with the highest rankings were considered those factors most critical for church renewal.

The research team discovered strong evidence of leadership impact in the turnaround process. More specifically, they found that 276 of the 324 respondents (85.2%) reported that the comeback process coincided with significant pastoral and/or staff changes, with 63.6 % of those reporting a change in the senior pastor. The majority of those remaining churches that did not change senior pastors reported that a significant change did, in fact, occur within the senior pastor either in leadership style, preaching style, shepherding style, or the extra work of ministry. The leaders surveyed in this study rated “leadership” as the factor having the highest impact in making a comeback. That leadership entails portraying an attitude of growth, displaying intentionality and proactivity, and casting a shared vision in order to participate in shared ministry.

Summary

It seems almost an assumption to most who study church growth that the pastor’s role in fostering sustained church growth and revitalization is significant. Barna’s (1993) study, by utilizing ministers as his primary data source, indicated his conviction that pastors are vital in the turnaround process. The researcher concluded that two important factors in renewal were in fact the selection of strong leadership by the pastor himself or herself. Two more elements are pastoral attributes (love for people and work ethic), one

is an action entirely the pastors (quality sermons), and three others require strong, assertive pastoral leadership.

Avery (2002) discovered, in searching for factors that contribute to turnaround, that specific actions, styles, and behaviors by pastors are very often the source of conflicts and circumstances that in fact led to the beginning of the church's decline. His conclusions were that pastors have a profound impact on the life of a church, that lack of adaptability, mismatches, and poor management skills often are the negative impetus for a congregation's initial decline. And, as will be delineated later in this study, specific intentional actions by pastors can begin the positive recovery of a congregation.

Rainer's (2001) research design allowed formerly unchurched people to tell their own stories of the factors that influenced them to become active in their particular church. The overwhelming nature of the respondents' answers that the pastor was the most important influence in their becoming active in their particular church, and the doctrinal clarity proclaimed by the pastor was a close second. Rainer, convinced of the importance of the pastor in reaching the unchurched, expanded his research to the pastors of effective evangelistic churches and compared them to pastors of churches that did not meet those criteria. There appeared to be no evidence that significant turnaround has occurred without strong pastoral leadership.

Stetzer and Dodson (2007) found even more compelling evidence of pastoral impact, when their research revealed that almost without exception, every church traces the beginning of its turnaround to a change in pastor and/or staff or the change in leadership styles of the senior pastor. That 85% credit a pastoral or staff change, and four-fifths of those marking a change in the senior pastor, lends credence to Barna's

(1993) assertion that turnaround rarely occurs apart from a personnel change in pastoral leadership. The new energy and attitude, fresh intentionality, and focus on vision casting that often accompany new leadership seem to be contributing factors for igniting turnaround, corresponding to Kouzes and Posner's (2002) call to inspire a shared vision.

The Search for a Paradigm of Turnaround Leadership

Drawing from his experience as a pastor attempting to spur revitalization of a 94-year-old congregation mired in decline, Goodwin (1999) offered theoretical direction for those seeking to lead a congregation to turnaround. He described a "church health" movement that melds the works of those advancing the church growth movement to a broader understanding of church life with those teachers of family systems theory, conflict management, social psychology, and leadership theory. He posited that congregational decline has begun in part because studies have too narrowly focused on congregational growth or decline only. Rather, he suggested that the initial work of renewal begins with an accurate "organizational health" analysis—which includes examination of growth or decline signals, as well as organization or structure, movement, transformation, sensitivity, adaptation, and reproduction.

In his autobiographical account, Reeder (2008) provided insight from his experience in leading two congregations through successful revitalization efforts as pastor. He became pastor of Pinelands Presbyterian Church in Miami—a church which once had a membership of almost 900, four worship services, vital Sunday School and Christian day school ministries, and effective youth and missions ministries. When he arrived, the Sunday morning attendance was below 80, and the Sunday School membership was 20 adults with no children. The average age of the congregation was 69,

vandalism was a regular occurrence, and the church was supported by the surplus from its preschool. In 3 years' time, however, the church grew to an average attendance of over 400, with over half of the growth from conversion or rededication and a loss of only one family from the original congregation during the process. His second successful revitalization experience occurred in Christ Covenant Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, where the church grew from 38 members to over 3,000 in attendance over the course of his 17 years as pastor.

Citing no specific methodology for his assertions, but sharing from seminars that the author presents throughout the country and mirroring the assertions of Goodwin (1999), Reeder (2008) suggested the paradigm for revitalization within a church should not focus on church growth, but rather upon church health. He asserted that growth will occur if the body is healthy, and leaders must first ascertain the factors that have led to decline in a congregation and seek to address those maladies, in order to begin the process of being made "well." He further expanded the paradigm to include the biblical advice given to the church in decline in Ephesus in the in Revelation 2:4-5, asserting that churches should remember from where they have fallen, repent for the mistakes that brought them to their declined state, and recover the first things that made the body vital in its former time.

Crandall (1995) studied small churches of less than 200 members and/or 100 at worship that had experienced significant revitalization in the 2 to 5 years prior to the study to discover factors that contributed to the turnaround. The researcher sent letters to judicatory leaders in over 50 denominations seeking recommendations of churches which had experienced a new sense of hope and empowerment, a new vision for ministry, a new

effectiveness in evangelism, and new growth in membership/church school/worship attendance, especially those where the community context cannot account for the renewal and church growth. The leaders nominated over 200 churches and pastors from 11 denominations. Of those, 186 pastors were contacted by letter and were asked to participate in the project by filling out a survey-style, open-ended questionnaire. Over 136 agreed to participate, and 97 returned usable surveys. The researcher selected three additional pastors to produce an even 100 ($n = 100$) stories as the database for the project.

Crandall (1995) asked the pastors to portray the leadership role and approach they employed for revitalization and growth. Most offered multiple descriptors, but the top three responses were (a) visionary, (b) enabler/encourager, and (c) partner/friend. In fact, the image of “visionary” emerged as the significant paradigm above the total of 21 categories identified by the pastors. It received one-third more responses than “enabler/encourager” and twice as many as “partner/friend.” The researcher concluded that effective leadership has a direction, a goal, and a vision for what God desires to do in the congregation. These pastors seemed to invest their energies regularly into gathering momentum, maintaining flexibility, and working for the transformation of spirits to inspire others to embrace a collective vision for God’s work within that congregation.

Russell (2004) noted a major paradigm shift that occurred after 10 years as pastor of Mission Baptist Church in Locust, NC, not only in his thinking, but also in the expectations of his church members. As the church began to grow, the senior minister ceased to function as the “placating pastor” and was no longer the “first responder” in a crisis. He described his role in the 18 years since as that of a “visionary pastor,” one whose primary focus is to cast a vision of what people can become in the Kingdom of

God. His church sought to equip and empower all people to serve as ministers, and the senior pastor's role is that of a coach and mentor in that process.

The overwhelming influence of the pastor reported by unchurched persons in influencing them to become active in church led Rainer (2001) to expand his research efforts to the pastors themselves. His research group selected 101 ($n = 101$) pastors of effective evangelistic churches, as well as a group of 101 ($n = 101$) "comparison" church pastors whose churches did not meet the criteria of the effective churches. The researchers conducted in-depth written and telephone interviews of the two groups of pastors to ascertain the consistency of findings between the formerly unchurched and the effective church pastors, and to discern the differences in actions, convictions, and priorities of the effective church pastors and the comparison church pastors. The researchers found the responses of the formerly unchurched and the effective church pastors to be highly consistent with no major contradictions noted in the comments of the two groups. Not surprisingly, the responses of the two pastor groups highlighted significant differences.

Rainer (2001) noted stark contrasts in the self-reported leadership styles of the two pastor groups. Of 10 leadership styles presented, the top four responses of comparison church leaders suggested a more consensus-building, people-centered approach: (a) relationship oriented (high interest in people, feelings, and fellowship), (b) suggestion oriented (leading by making suggestions), (c) team player (group-oriented, leading by example), and (d) organization oriented (every detail checked). The effective church pastors led in notably different ways: (a) task oriented (high interest in production

and getting things done), (b) goal oriented (setting goals and pushing for completion), (c) team player, and (d) relationship oriented.

Summary

As Rainer (2001) noted, turnaround leaders have a penchant for action. Pastors utilized relatively small amounts of time in most church revitalization literature painting abstract pictures of their roles in leading a turnaround congregation. As will be seen later in this review, when given the opportunity to share freely, these leaders typically highlight the regular behaviors they feel contribute to the momentum of change. However, when pushed to think holistically, they call themselves primarily task oriented, goal oriented, and visionary.

As noted previously by Fullan (2006) in school leadership studies, a common thread in declining churches and organizations is a need for cultural change. This awareness has led some to assert that the primary focus of turnaround efforts should be attention to the overall organizational health. Those engaging in this process will engage in careful analysis of issues that contributed to the decline and will devote efforts to correcting congregational maladies (Goodwin, 1999; Reeder, 2008), as one would do while incorporating Kouzes and Posner's (2002) practice of challenging the process.

The turnaround leader seems, more than other leaders, bent towards setting, selling, and achieving goals. It is not that these ministers are apathetic about fostering positive relationships with their parishioners, they are simply not held hostage to the need for consensus. Throughout the turnaround literature, it seems obvious that the dominant paradigm for ministers successful in fostering turnaround is that of a "visionary" (Crandall, 1995; Russell, 2004). As the work of the church is primarily accomplished

through a voluntary work force, pastors fostering revitalization must be very conscious of their actions to promote positive relations with their parishioners. Their primary role is that of gaining collective “buy-in” to a desired future and motivating their staffs and members to engage in the work of ministry towards those goals (Crandall, 1995; Rainer, 2001). They inspire a shared vision by enlisting others (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

The Attributes of a Successful Turnaround Pastor

Certainly, no one would argue that some are better suited than others for positions of leadership. Though many may aspire to positions of leadership and may well embrace the sound theoretical composition of a leader, many have sought to determine if there were specific personality traits that contributed to the success of certain leaders. Though there are no perfect leaders who possess all the “right” qualities, researchers have contributed lists of characteristics that should be given consideration based upon the particular context.

Rainer (2001) discovered that the other most mentioned “actions” of the pastor in influencing the unchurched to become active, mentioned by the unchurched themselves, were in fact “attributes.” The third and fourth most mentioned pastoral factors were pastoral “authenticity” and pastoral “conviction” (34 % each). The formerly unchurched appreciated pastors who were “down-to-earth,” “humorous,” “real,” and “willing to admit mistakes.” Likewise, they were drawn by the conviction and certitude of the effective church pastors to teach with depth and to tackle tough issues with scripture. “A good communicator” and “a good leader” were each mentioned by 25 % of the participants as significant to their decision to return and become active. The “skill” of communication might well be viewed as the tool by which the two most mentioned “actions” of “biblical

preaching” and relevant preaching” is accomplished. It is additionally interesting to note that even the unchurched noticed the direction and vision cast by the pastor as leader.

The pastors of effective evangelistic churches were asked, “What do you feel your greatest strengths are in the area of leadership?” There were 12 personal attributes listed by over half of the participants (Rainer, 2001). Those traits in descending order of most mentioned (with % in parentheses) were (a) the ability to cast vision (72), (b) sense of humor (68), (c) work ethic (67), (d) persistence (65), (e) leadership by example (59), (f) integrity (57), (g) change agent (57), (h) love of God’s word (54), (i) communication skills (53), (j) faith/optimism, (k) relational skills/love of people (52), and (l) team building/mentoring (50). It was also interesting to note that the top five weaknesses listed all revealed an awareness of the importance of dealing with people: (a) pastoral ministry (73), (b) lack of patience (71), (c) dealing with staff (70), (d) dealing with criticism (67), and (e) always task-driven (64).

Barna (1993) revealed a set of personal attributes present in the turnaround pastors he interviewed. The turnaround leaders were (a) team builders, (b) vision providers, (c) seekers of personal spiritual growth, (d) encouragers, (e) strategic thinkers, (f) risk-takers, and almost all of them were (g) youthful (45 or younger), (h) workaholics, (60 to 80 hours per week), (i) strong personalities, and (j) potential visionaries—having not given prior evidence of being a visionary.

Specifically targeting rural church leaders, Crandall (1995) asked the participating pastors in his study to rate their strongest qualities and skills that they believed contributing to their effectiveness as turnaround leaders. Their top responses indicated that they were strong communicators through preaching, skilled at loving and working

with people, gifted at administration and organization, excelled at teaching and training, and effective motivators of people towards achieving a vision. These responses were confirmed by members who were asked to evaluate their pastors with the top four responses being (a) loving people, (b) displaying people skills, (c) preaching, and (d) being a visionary and motivator. The only differing response added by members was that they felt their pastor displayed having a personal faith and love for God.

Frazer (1995) offered an autobiographical account of the turnaround that occurred at Pantego Bible Church during his tenure as pastor. The church rebounded from losing nearly 1,000 members between 1986 to 1990 after the departure of a 25-year pastor, growing from a worship attendance of 325 to nearly 1,200 just 4 years later and an annual 20% growth in the church budget under his leadership. The author provided insight into his own results from the Biblical Personality Profile (1977) to highlight what he believed made him an effective change agent. He took the profile on four different occasions, and each time he was characterized as a “persuader.” These types of people (a) work with and through people to win their own objectives, (b) possess an outgoing interest in people and have the ability to gain their respect and confidence, (c) exhibit mobility while preferring challenging and varied work assignments, (d) exude optimism, almost to a fault, (e) need analytical data on a systematic basis to keep from being impulsive, and (f) require alerting to the importance of “little things.” Additionally, these “change agents” enjoy bringing order out of chaos and target energy creating discontent with the status quo so that constituents are motivated to enlist in pursuing a new direction.

Wood (2001) shared personal insights from 25 years in the ministry and success in multiple turnaround churches ranging in size from 50 to over 1,200 members. His

work focused on the self-evaluation necessary to undertake the task and the leadership habits he found conducive to becoming a turnaround leader. The author posited seven characteristics a leader must ask to assess the turnaround potential within themselves. A successful turnaround leader, according to Wood is (a) willing to confront conflict, (b) possessing high energy—energized by work, (c) maintaining good physical shape, (d) making family a priority, (e) growing personally, (f) understanding church-life instinctively, and (g) thinking strategically.

At the time of publication, Nixon (2004) was serving as district superintendent for the Dallas district of the Church of the Nazarene. Previously, he had served for 32 years in the pastorate, including leading six different churches back to a period of growth and vitality after a major crisis, decline, or plateau. Sharing insight from his experience in leading those revitalization efforts, the author proposed a set of personal attributes that he felt contributed to a person's ability to lead a successful turnaround process: (a) a capacity for authentic relationships; (b) personal authenticity—including the capacity to share ministry, foster creativity, and mobilize laity; (c) personal autonomy; (d) an allocentric attitude; and (e) a strong sense of self-efficacy.

Page (2008) shared insight into the leadership principles that Perry prioritized in leading two congregations through successful turnaround processes. As pastor of Warren Baptist Church in Augusta, Georgia, Page was able to lead the congregation to 300 % growth in Sunday School and worship attendance. After 4½ years as pastor of First Baptist Church in Taylors, South Carolina at the time of publication, he had led that body to 70 % and 130 % growth in Sunday School and worship attendance, respectively. For him, the turnaround pastor must be possessed of a purpose greater than himself, a

constant caster of a vision with enthusiasm, conviction, and dedication to the goal of making disciples for Christ. He must be trustworthy, credible, and consistent, as well as adept at managing and investing in relationships with members and church leaders. The turnaround leader must be confident and secure enough to share ministry and be skilled at securing and positioning the right people in the ministries that are suited to their gifts and the goals of the congregation.

Rainer and Lawless (2003) summarized their work through research and consulting in hundreds of churches throughout America and presented principles they found consistent in traditional churches that experienced a period of growth. Their work utilized qualitative research methods that involved surveys and interviews with pastors, key church leaders, and new members in congregations. This project represented research conducted in evangelical, Protestant churches and provided perspective on what pastors and churches “did” to foster growth, as well as personal characteristics of the pastor who led a turnaround. The authors provided two composite stories of churches that experienced a sustained period of growth—Calvary Church in an aging subdivision in a small Western town and Ewart Fork Church in a Kansas town of less than 1,000—and one actual story of Buck Run Baptist Church, an 180+-year-old congregation in Frankfort, Kentucky.

In describing the characteristics of the pastors who led a turnaround, Rainer and Lawless outlined five strengths: (a) a dependence on God; (b) a commitment to stay, (c) wisdom in initiating change, (d) an attitude of encouragement, and (e) a love for people. They delineated those findings by describing five prices pastors desiring church growth must be willing to pay: (a) assume responsibility for growth, (b) work hard, (c) willingly

share their ministries and develop the lay ministries of the church, (d) accept that they cannot personally pastor every member and thus create small groups with accountability, and (e) realize that a desire for church growth is biblically and theologically sound.

Summary

The varied findings of the researchers suggests that there is no single “profile” of a turnaround church leader. These studies do, however, offer church leaders some commonalities to consider as they examine the attributes of potential pastoral candidates for a church in need of revitalization. The lone attribute that every researcher listed was a strong work ethic. Some researchers found that these turnaround leaders often worked 10-15 hours more per week than those who have not experienced similar revitalization success. Barna (1993) called them “workaholics,” and Wood (2001) described himself and others like him as “energized by work.” Turnaround leaders possess high levels of energy and are driven to work long hours.

Two attributes highlighted by several suggest that these leaders are “big picture people” and “strategic thinkers” (Barna, 1993; Crandall, 1995; Page, 2008; Rainer, 2001; Wood, 2001). More than just selling a vision, these leaders seem to be “dreamers” themselves and envision ennobling futures for their congregations (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). They see things for how they might be, and their communication gifts help them cast their dreams and enlist others (Kouzes and Posner, 2002) in aspiring to that future through their contagious optimism and enthusiasm. Similarly, these leaders possess the ability to think strategically for the future—to plan for desired results, to understand the components necessary to foster growth, and to foresee and navigate through potential hazards.

Successful turnaround leaders often possess confidence in themselves and their abilities, enabling them to function as team builders, to share leadership with others, and to foster creativity (Nixon, 2004, Page, 2008; Rainer & Lawless, 2003). Turnaround pastors are adept at developing and maintaining relationships, at managing and strategically positioning others, and at encouraging others regularly. They understand the change process, embrace change, and are skilled at fostering change in the thought processes and functioning of their congregations (Frazee, 1995; Page, 2008; Rainer & Lawless, 2003). These pastors embody their message, leading by example, and are perceived as authentic, consistent and credible. They love people and are perceived as warm and caring by their parishioners (Barna, 1993; Frazee, 1995; Nixon, 2004; Rainer, 2001). Kouzes and Posner (2002) would refer to these actions as enabling others to act, encouraging the heart, challenging the process, and modeling the way.

Overt Behaviors that Contribute to Church Growth

The necessity to produce turnaround in churches across the country requires, however, that more than just a select cadre of leaders be developed from among the select few who possess a specific number of the aforementioned character traits. The literature overwhelming reveals that there are specific behaviors in which successful leaders engage with regularity and from priority.

Schaller (1981) consulted with hundreds of churches prior to many of the studies conducted through the research of our educational institutions and noticed patterns of decline and plateau after certain junctures in churches' lives. He utilized the term "passivity" to describe the state of churches characterized by a lack of enthusiasm, divisiveness, "goallessness," and drift. He noticed it specifically in churches that had

reached at least 20 years old and in traditional, long-established churches. He listed 27 circumstances which sometimes foster passivity in order that churches might be able to begin to treat the malady by first diagnosing its source. Much of this work centered on the need for the congregation to rediscover what he called “roles” and “goals.” In current terminology, he referred to purpose and vision. He observed that most churches slid into passivity because they lost the sense of ministry to which they were called, they completed a season of ministry (such as a long-term pastorate), or they completed goals and have no vision for where they are currently headed.

The author indicated that leadership which could effectively move churches out of this state involved (a) sharpening the evangelistic thrust outward instead of looking inward for institutional maintenance, (b) re-examining the identity and community image of the congregation, (c) analyzing the unmet needs of people outside the church, (d) making choices about specialized ministries, and (e) identifying and affirming congregational assets and resources for ministry. In the initial stages of activating the church for ministry, the author found new pastors had been successful by (a) being assertive in leadership; (b) setting short-term goals; (c) looking for and celebrating every victory; (d) calling on the “exploited”—those workers who provide most of the leg work for the congregation—to gain their support; (e) providing healing for the angry, alienated, inactive, and those grieving the loss of the former pastor; (f) building a new leadership team; and (g) planning to stay for the long-term, as research indicated that most significant growth did not happen until at least the fourth year of a pastorate.

Barna (1993) discovered that turnaround leaders exhibited consistent strategies for growth which included (a) being sensitive to the past, but focusing on the future; (b)

modeling spiritual depth for the people; (c) doing just a few things with excellence; (d) returning to the basics; (e) providing opportunities for the people to enjoy some success; (f) acting quickly when arriving and building momentum; (g) emphasizing people, not programs; (h) fostering personal relationships with one another; and (i) exhibiting persistence. The researcher also noted that (a) the laity had to be carefully trained to participate in ministry; (b) the worship services were imprinted with the style, attitude, and character of the new pastor; (c) a viable prayer ministry was developed; (d) an outward-looking perspective was planted in the minds and hearts of the people, and (e) events were geared to build public awareness of the church.

In noting the success of intentional interim ministers in beginning the turnaround process in struggling congregations, Avery (2002) noted that the three essential tasks of the interim are (1) to reduce the level of conflict, (2) to assist the congregation with its self identity, and (3) to help the church set goals for the future. The interims accomplish these tasks by being intentional about beginning the reconciliation process in fostering congregational communication and honesty in a variety of settings, by affirming the discouraged people, and by listening and communicating the goal of healing. If the interim followed a long-term pastorate, they were conscious to give the congregation time to grieve the loss of the minister. Additionally, the interim provided strong administrative skills and leadership to promote confidence, stability, and to address sources of discouragement such as decaying buildings and poor public perception.

The churches in this study (Avery, 2002) demonstrated that robust, trustworthy, growing ministries can occur even in areas where the immediate community is stable or declining. These churches began to experience new life by not focusing inward, but

rather on keeping the focus on mission outside the church. These congregations establish a new identity by analyzing the gifts, resources, and opportunities that they have and by understanding afresh the mission it holds within its context. As the congregation understands its purpose and identity, then it is ready to set congregational goals and plan for its future, including calling a pastor appropriate to their needs and vision, developing lay leadership, and laying the foundations for the goals they seek to reach.

Once the settled pastor is called, Avery (2002) asserted that he or she can sustain the work of revitalization by exhibiting a transparent faith; practicing good communication skills; prioritizing the development of younger lay leadership while engaging the older, long-time members; adapting to the needs and personality of the congregations; developing a vision and a map of specific steps to reach that vision; and working with high energy and effectiveness.

Focusing specifically on rural churches, Crandall (1995) interviewed 100 pastors of small turnaround churches. His research revealed 12 emerging turnaround strategies for small churches practiced by those leaders: (a) enhance congregational confidence and hope for the future; (b) stimulate concern for unreached persons in the community; (c) engage in proactive and effective pastoral leadership; (d) encourage an open, loving atmosphere in the congregation; (e) clarify pastoral personal vision and be an example; (f) help develop a clear, shared, congregational vision; (g) work and pray for spiritual renewal among the members; (h) provide high quality preaching and inspirational worship; (i) lead the effort to reach new people and grow; (j) emphasize and practice prayer; (k) develop new programs, especially for children and youth; and, (l) plan to take risks and take them.

In the follow up study of his previous work with small membership churches that had experienced some measure of turnaround, Crandall (2008) received responses from 28 of the original participating pastors, received responses from 18 pastors who were now serving churches that had participated, and made contacts with 12 other participating churches through lay persons. Of the 36 churches he was able to contact, only six of the pastors were still leading the congregations a decade later, and two were working alongside a new pastor. These contacts revealed that a few of those churches were booming, with four now averaging from 200 to 1,700 in worship. One had even been involved in planting 65 churches in six different countries. However, the sad findings were that three-fourths of the congregations from the original study that were contacted a decade later had lost ground and entered a season of decline and conflict. Several had even closed their doors or were on the brink of doing so.

Besides seeking to discern whether the assertions from the original work were valid, his follow-up work centered on the question, “What caused some to maintain the momentum and others to fall back again into decline or even despair?” Though not highlighted in his first study, the author gleaned from these findings that pastoral longevity was unquestionably linked to successful turnaround. Yet, the realities of small church life reveal that pastoral turnover and transitions continue to be one of the chief obstacles to turnaround. With this seemingly inevitable fate, he suggested that pastors and church leaders plan for transitions, to the degree possible, well before they are even considered a possibility. He emphasized the importance of an overarching vision that guides a church’s ministry into the future beyond the tenure of a single pastor. For the incoming pastor seeking to maintain turnaround momentum, the author proposed

approaching the ministry with gratitude and humility, affirming the work of the predecessor and the bold steps of faith taken by the congregation, communicating that events of the past are simply preparation for great things to come, and investing in careful and strategic listening.

Seeking to discover possible contributions of factors to membership decline, Decker and Griesinger (1997) conducted a statistical study of membership performance in 230 ($n = 230$) United Methodist congregations in southern California from 1980 to 1993, hoping to identify strategies for reversing the trend. The researchers examined data from the church's *California-Pacific Annual Conference Journals* and from census records. Additionally, they examined detailed questionnaires completed by more than 400 lay leaders from more than 80 congregations and personal interviews with numerous United Methodist church and conference leaders. Of this group, the researchers received completed questionnaires from at least three respondents in only 77 of the churches, the data group used for the final analysis.

Statistical analysis indicated that three factors were significantly related to membership decline during the period study: urban location, increasing ethnic diversity in the local neighborhood, and number of pastoral changes. In analyzing the questionnaires, the researchers discovered a complex set of interactions which, when multiple variables were considered together, presented significant insight into the differences between growing and declining churches. Two interactions revealed a significant correlation with membership decline: conflicting cultures, describing the conflict over the implementation of bold innovative plans, and the leadership's negative view of laity, composed of the interaction between the variables of the leadership clique's own internal solidarity and

trust, an emphasis on stewardship over evangelism, and a negative view of the average church member (Decker & Griesinger, 1997).

The strongest effect on membership growth was the interaction called “reaching out to newcomers,” which was composed of the variables “offering interesting and attractive programs,” “making membership easy and convenient,” and “placing more emphasis on increasing the number of members in the church than on increasing the commitment of existing members.” The second highest effect was the interaction called “building member commitment,” composed of member commitment and tolerance of differences. A third factor Decker and Griesinger discovered to be associated with church growth was “equipping the laity for ministry,” and the interaction between the presence of a bold collective vision of the future and equally bold efforts to equip and deploy the laity to bringing that vision to fruition. The fourth positive correlation with membership growth was the interaction called “bold plans for growth,” involving the interaction between planning and the degree of stretch required to reach the church’s goals and aspirations.

Seeking to aid churches in need of a change in direction, Herrington, Bonem, and Furr (2000) compiled a guide for leading a transformational process in a congregation setting based upon their findings while working with over 100 churches in the Houston, Texas area that were a part of the Union Baptist Association and from teaching the change process to over 1,000 pastors. Their work began with an analysis of growth within Southern Baptist in their area in the 40-year period from 1950 to 1989 which revealed that while the association had shown steady growth in virtually all areas during that period, their growth had not matched the population growth during that same period.

These leaders became alarmed that in almost every annual period they had in fact lost “market share” of their constituency for 40 years. The authors began to convene pastors in the area who shared like-minded concern about this trend and who committed to passionately engage the question, “How do we transform declining congregations into Christ-like bodies that display the power of the Gospel in our communities” (p. 1)?

Gleaning from Christian and business literature, especially from Senge’s *The Fifth Discipline* (1990) and Kotter’s *Leading Change* (1996), the authors developed a model for change and initiated a pilot project in 10 congregations in 1991. They guided the congregations in a strategic planning process of essentially three components: (a) a thorough assessment of internal health and external factors, (b) the development of a mission and vision statement that the congregations could use to assess their progress, and (c) identifying key priorities that would enable them to make the most progress toward achieving their mission and vision. Upon realizing that only one of the congregations in the pilot project had a highly successful experience, they realized that they had not adequately addressed the foundation that was essential to begin a change process – spiritual and relational vitality.

With additional churches embracing their work, now with an emphasis on laying a proper foundation, over the next 5 years, the leadership team from the association noted many congregations that were beginning to make progress – incremental at first, then more substantial over time. However, they began to note that when consultants that were working with congregations exited, the process often stalled. They realized that the consultants were in fact leading the process, with the pastors merely endorsing and empowering it, while managing the existing programs and ministries of the church.

Again, finding wisdom in Senge (1990), the authors and their leadership team determined that there were disciplines that leaders of congregations must continue to learn in order to guide an organization through turbulent times of significant change. This ultimately led to the formation of a Young Leaders program for pastors that involved a 2-year process of learning leadership in the context of community and centers around the development of those four disciplines in the transformational leaders.

Through this multi-year learning processes, Herrington et al. (2000) arrived at what they call “the congregational transformation model” that they offered as a guide for leading congregational change. The process has three interdependent components: spiritual and relational vitality, an eight-stage process for change, and four essential learning disciplines for the leader. The first component of vitality provides the heart of the transformation, the commitment to the process of becoming a congregation in the image God intended and the enthusiasm for maintaining a sometimes uncomfortable course as part of a growing personal and corporate relationship with God.

The eight components of the change process provide the road map for the journey (Herrington et al., 2000). First, the pastor and other key leaders set aside a period for personal assessment and preparation. They must prepare themselves for difficulties of leading change, analyze their own strengths and weaknesses, establish accountability, and practice personal spiritual disciplines. Second, these leaders must create a sense of urgency for a change by conducting internal and external assessments, making information widely available, and establishing the status quo as unacceptable. Third, change agents must establish the vision community – a diverse set of key members that

will commit themselves to discerning and implementing God's vision for the congregation.

With this groundwork laid, the fourth stage in the change process is discerning the vision and the path for implementing that vision. This is a gradual process that involves seeking input, prayer, writing a first draft, seeking private feedback within the vision community, revising, obtaining public feedback, revising if necessary, and developing consensus. According to the Herrington et al. (2000), this is a critical process that provides a distinct calling and identity for the congregation as well as making God's direction for the congregation's future clear and explicit. Stage five is communicating that vision through an intentional set of activities in order to develop a high level of understanding and commitment to God's vision for that particular church.

To achieve and maintain widespread impact, stage six of the process requires empowering change leaders and broadening the leadership base beyond the pastor and a few lay leaders. This involves removing barriers that would prevent leaders from serving effectively and sharing responsibility and decision-making ability with a wider set of leaders who are recruited and commissioned according to their abilities. Seventh, the leaders implement the vision through a specific set of coordinated, high-leverage initiatives that move the congregation toward the realization of their vision. These initiatives are treated as experiments and are not elevated to the realm of the sacred. Processes for evaluation and modification are established, and programs are developed to meet priorities, given the specific gifts and resources that exist within that congregation. Finally, the change process requires that momentum be reinforced through alignment. Leaders continually recast the vision, take time to celebrate wins, implement new action

plans, address pockets of resistance, establish internal monitoring posts, and continue adaptation to the external environment in alignment with the vision (Herrington et al., 2000).

Perhaps because of their heavy influence from business literature, or perhaps because many of the churches with which they worked were not necessarily considered in decline until they compared themselves to the dynamics of their population, Herrington et al. (2000) used the term “transformational leadership” to describe the process that pastors and churches do in this change process. They asserted that these leaders inspire and empower followers to achieve new levels of personal and corporate performance, encourage and support innovative ventures, and—because they are trusted and respected—help followers internalize the spirit and goals of the organization. To do this effectively, they suggested that these leaders must seek to master four learning disciplines: (a) generating and sustaining creative tension, (b) harnessing the power of mental models or paradigms that guide the actions of their followers, (c) enabling team learning and productivity beyond their individual capacities, and (d) practicing systems thinking and the interactions of the different parts, rather than simply considering the sum of the individual parts.

In another design that compared performance results of simultaneous occurring events, Rainer’s (2001) research revealed significant differences in the time utilization habits of effective church pastors and those of comparison churches that had not experienced significant turnaround. First, the researchers noted a marked difference in the work ethic of the two pastor groups. Effective church pastors reported working an average of 13 more work hours per week and 12 less sleep hours per week than the

comparison church pastors. The effective church pastors spend three times as much time (15 hours to 5) in administrative duties, two-and-a-half times more in mentoring (5 to 2), twice as much in staff meetings (4 to 2), 5 hours a week in personal evangelism and 2 hours in personal accountability where comparison pastors average none. The comparison pastors spend 8 hours a week in custodial duties compared to none for the effective church pastors, four times as much in committee/board meetings (8 to 2), and over three times as much time in pastoral care (33 to 10) – the maintenance activities of counseling, hospital visits, weddings, and funerals. It was also noteworthy that effective church pastors report an average of 4 more hours per week in family time than comparison church pastors (22 to 18).

The effective church pastors seemed to understand the importance the unchurched place on quality preaching, as they reported spending over five times as much time in sermon preparation as their comparison church counterparts (22 hours to 4). In the follow-up interviews with the effective church pastors, the researchers asked how those pastors were able to connect their sermons with the unchurched. The effective pastors mirrored the top three factors of the formerly unchurched in order, stating that their sermons were biblical (“teaches the Bible”), relevant (“applies to my life”), and transparent (“authenticity”). Those pastors also added that their sermons were “illustrative” and “well-prepared.” Though the effective church pastors understood the importance of people and relationships, they were intentional about certain heretofore unmentioned activities such as promoting high expectations of all members and striving for excellence, developing small group ministries and ministry involvement, and building strong youth and children’s ministries (Rainer, 2001).

Summarizing their findings from turnaround churches, Rainer and Lawless (2003) described “ten lessons from three churches” as common threads in the lives of those churches: (a) the priority of prayer; (b) the security of the pastor’s call that he is where God wants him to be; (c) a pastoral commitment to stay for the long-term; (d) a desire for growth; (e) surviving and learning from battles; (f) learning balance in worship styles; (g) exhibiting Christ-like leadership skills of strength, servanthood, focus, and wisdom; (h) the importance of Sunday School; (i) balanced use of time by the pastor; and (j) a love for church members. They presented a visual of what they called the vision cycle of a turnaround congregation. The five stages of that cycle are (a) an outward focus, (b) unleashing the church through lay ministry, (c) rekindling the vision, (d) ministry and growth, and (e) organization and structure.

Stetzer and Dodson (2007) discovered from their study of 300 comeback churches that leaders of those congregations believed that a vibrant faith with a focus on the person of Jesus Christ and the mission of the church, as well as commitments to service and prayer ministries, were essential in revitalization efforts. These ministries involve strong lay leadership and empowerment, fueled by a strong commitment from the pastor and other leaders to equip and develop the laity, to hold high expectations, and then to share in ministry leadership. Comeback churches are intentional about their evangelistic efforts, looking for multiple strategies and methods of outreach. Additionally, understanding that the worship service is the primary mode of outreach and ministry to prospective members, these churches strive to infuse energy, enthusiasm, and celebration into the worship experience.

Another source of useful information in this field are the books written by the pastors themselves who have guided their congregations to growth and revitalization. An early example of such a work is Mathison's (1992) book, where he shared the model for growth that Frazer Memorial United Methodist Church utilized to become the largest United Methodist Church in North America in Sunday School and worship attendance. Two years before his arrival as pastor in 1972, the congregation of 400 members had relocated because of interstate construction issues that had disbursed their Montgomery, AL community. The congregation began to grow under his leadership and adopted this model when they had about 700 members. At the time of publication, the church had over 6,000 members and still utilized the principles of growth outlined in this book.

Frazer Memorial's 11 principles suggest very intentional actions on the part of congregations to move towards growth. Those principles are as follows:

- 1) Designate a planning group. They call theirs the "Joel Committee"—based on Joel 2:28—because its job is to dream dreams and set long-term goals. The pastor's role is to sell the vision, hold leaders accountable, implement the plan, and equip others for ministry.
- 2) Define priorities. Frazer's priorities were evangelism, assimilation, and ministry involvement.
- 3) Decide to grow. Congregations must embrace regular change.
- 4) Diagnose health. Analyze 10-year attendance statistics, as well as sources of growth—transfer, biological, and conversion—and/or reasons for decline.
- 5) Document the demographic data. Define the target community population.
- 6) Determine needs. Discover the needs of the target population.

- 7) Delineate strengths and weaknesses. Conduct honest evaluation of the church's assets and liabilities.
- 8) Delegate the ministry. Train, empower, and involve all members in active ministry.
- 9) Design exciting, meaningful worship. Worship should be participatory and indigenous.
- 10) Develop staff. Staff responsibilities should be specialized, perhaps leading to multiple part-time staff members. Staff must also be willing to make long-term commitments and have strong relational skills.
- 11) Depend on God. Seek God's direction for the congregation.

Sharing from 27 years of leadership she and her husband spent working in churches, Sims (1992) offered insights from their success in bringing renewed life to churches that were closed or almost closed. When her husband died of Lou Gehrig's disease, she carried on the work as pastor of multiple churches and continued the ministry of revitalization and growth in multiple churches. She shared six insights that she felt were crucial actions in the turnaround process: (a) understand the purpose of the church is to win the lost and equip them for ministry; (b) set goals and hold yourself responsible for them; (c) train and release the laity to use their talents in ministry; (d) know how to handle money and avoid debt; (e) create a need so people will feel invited to participate in ministry; and (f) do everything with class, beauty, and one's best effort.

Frazer (1995) consciously chose the term "revisioning" over "revitalization" to describe the comeback process in his church, believing that the primary components of turnaround were (a) refining the mission, (b) identifying the needs of a new constituency

for a new era, and (c) translating that vision into specific goals. To accomplish these tasks, the pastor (a) changed the leadership structure to promote ownership, accountability, and support for necessary change; (b) restructured the worship service to develop corporate celebration; (c) organized the congregation into communities and cells with shared pastoral responsibilities; (d) developed high quality children and family ministries; (e) mobilized volunteers strategically; and (f) eliminated programs that were ineffective or inefficient with resources given their mission goals.

Once church leaders are armed with an honest evaluation of their congregation's health as outlined earlier, Goodwin (1999) offered a detailed congregational revitalization process that begins with designing a turnaround process. He suggested that a task force of competent leaders be charged to develop a shared vision and goals for the congregation that will unite, excite, and mobilize the body. Secondly, the author proposed a period of study that clarifies the vision and gives specificity to the mission of that specific set of believers positioned within a particular geographical and cultural context at a specific time. In order to do that accurately, the study group must have an accurate assessment of the chief complaint that prompted the turnaround movement, history behind present problems, congregational and social histories, context and environment, congregational culture, and interaction of systems that operate within the body. This leads to a general description that serves as a baseline for a common understanding the present reality of the congregation.

The third stage of organizational renewal, according to Goodwin (1999), is the development of the plan, arrived at through discussion, deliberation, and then decision on a map of future action. That map will "put feet" to the vision by delineating specific

action strategies for addressing needs in each of the seven hallmarks of congregational health. Strong pastoral and lay leadership become especially important if the body is able to move into the action component of the process. The leaders must stay one step ahead of the congregation gathering and positioning resources and information, anticipating and managing bumps in the process, maintaining focus, and engaging in systems thinking. Tending the vision through integration of programs, elimination of ineffective ministries, evaluation of programs, and celebration of accomplishment is the final component of this author's turnaround process.

Sharing other insights from a voice of experience, Mann (1999) was an Episcopalian priest who, at the time of publication, had pastored six congregations over 19 years and worked with four congregations in severe decline and was serving as a consultant-trainer with The Alban Institute in the areas of parish development, growth strategies, and leadership skills. Sharing from her experience as a pastor and consultant, the author suggested that the path to redevelopment begins with an accurate self-analysis by leaders and members of a congregation, discerning the degree to which the group is characterized by five characteristics of growing churches: (a) a clear and positive identity, (b) consistent focus on people who are not members, (c) congregational harmony, (d) a positive dynamic between pastor and congregation, and (e) small-group programming. An honest assessment of the church in regards to these characteristics opens the door of discussion of difficult issues the congregation must face. According to Mann, the second stage of the turnaround process is reconnecting the congregation with the context in which it exists, which involves analysis of strengths and weaknesses, analysis of community needs, and regaining a flexibility to be able to adapt to the

environment. The leaders and congregations in redevelopment find themselves seeking new answers to three formative questions: Who are we? What are we here for? Who is our neighbor?

After the initial work of analysis, Mann (1999) suggested the congregation and leaders may attempt the difficult path of redevelopment, which involves (a) recognizing the death of the congregation's previous identity and purpose, (b) reallocating the bulk of the congregation's resources to discovering and living out a new identity and purpose, (c) finding and empowering leaders who can, in effect, start a new congregation on an existing site, and (d) caring for the remaining members of the previous congregation – sometimes by providing a separate chaplaincy ministry as long as it may be needed.

Patton (2002) described the “levers” the East Canton United Methodist Church in rural, north-central Pennsylvania utilized, while under his direction, to transform its congregation from a struggling body in a two-point charge to a single-church appointment with worship attendance growing three-fold and a new sanctuary to house its attendees. The congregation engaged in an intentional process involving (a) focusing on prayer; (b) discerning a clear mission; (c) developing indigenous worship; (d) creating caring, outreach-oriented growth groups; (e) making membership mean something; and (f) releasing laity to do ministry and pastoral care.

As another who led a congregation through successful turnaround, Wood (2001) also compiled a list of 10 characteristics of turnaround leaders. These suggest a style and pattern of leadership – what a pastor “does.” According to the author, turnaround leaders (a) consider leadership an act of service, (b) accept responsibility for the turnaround, (c) avoid a church which does not desire to become healthy, (d) establish the critical rules of

engagement before they arrive, (e) never backtrack, (f) keep close reign on their temper, (g) are discreet about what they share with others, (h) are willing to confront the sin of divisiveness, (i) possess “growth vision”—a passion to see lost souls won to Christ, and (j) are action-oriented and bold.

Russell (2004) provided insights into factors that contributed to the revitalization of Mission Baptist Church in Locust, North Carolina during the 13 years prior to publication of his work. Russell had been pastor of the church for 15 years; when faced with burn-out and a plateaued ministry, he began to lead his congregation through a process of renewal. He shared strategies employed by him and his leadership team during the transition. Those strategies included (a) “stirring the waters” of discontent with the state of matters as they were, (b) bringing in an outside prophet to speak harsh realities and offer hope for renewal and revitalization, (c) casting the vision repeatedly and in a variety of settings, (d) investing in and equipping a small core of potential leaders, (e) emphasizing mission and ministry to hurting people, (f) persevering through the difficult days of transition with an end-focus in mind, and (g) utilizing small changes and parallel structures, then allowing successes to fuel change.

Another pastor who had led successful revitalization efforts, Easum (2007) shared insights on leading congregational turnaround from his experience pastoring a congregation for 24 years and from his work for 20 years as a church consultant with over 600 churches. The author proposed that the leader who successfully ushers in new life will foster an environment that (a) embraces a vision of a future vastly different from the current state, (b) creates a level of discontent with the current environment that fosters a desire for change, (c) energizes the congregation with an emphasis on ministry to the

unchurched, (d) develops a culture of courage to embrace change, and (e) grows new leaders that embrace necessary change to support growth.

Additionally, turnaround leaders must be intentional to manage themselves as well as the change process. Easum (2007) suggested that the leader must make time for personal Bible study and prayer each day, as well as plan opportunities away from the church to dream and be filled with a vision for the church. The leader must embody servanthood, especially to those who oppose the turnaround effort. Additionally, the pastor must make a commitment for the long haul, enduring the trials, conflict, and frustrations of change and focusing on growing people spiritually and developing new leaders, while planning one or two quick victories and focusing on success in several short term goals to maintain a spirit of celebration and momentum for forward movement.

As one who has led a church through a dramatic revitalization, Harding (2007) shared his insights on factors that contributed to the turnaround of Dellrose United Methodist Church during the last 10 years. The author was appointed pastor of the church in Wichita, Kansas in 1998 when the church had declined from 500 members with an average attendance of 300 in the early 1970's to membership of 131 and an average attendance of 63. Harding led the congregation—a primarily graying, white congregation in a community that had transitioned to a black, middle-class neighborhood—through a change process that first carried them down to a membership of 25 persons. Dellrose, however, experienced significant turnaround, with a total membership over 600, worship attendance over 350, and offerings that had grown five-fold as of publication of his book.

Citing no specific methodology for arriving at his assertions, Harding (2007) states three primary foci that had contributed most significantly to the church turnaround. He states that Dellrose concentrated on revitalizing worship, specifically by analyzing their surrounding community and making their services culturally-relevant. They hired multiple part-time musicians and pursued high quality in all aspects of their ministry. Second, Dellrose focused on rebuilding discipleship, on building up the knowledge of the Bible among all its membership. Third, the church places great importance on shared ministry among all of the members, on finding the giftedness of the members and placing them in positions where they can serve best with those gifts.

The job description of the senior pastor for Dellrose includes four main categories of responsibility: (a) preaching, teaching, worship; (b) pastoral care; (c) equipping and supervising; and (d) administration. However, the role of equipping and supervising by the senior pastor is so important that listed first in the “principle function” of the senior pastor is “giving pastoral support, guidance, and training to the lay leadership in the local church, equipping them to fulfill the ministry to which they are sent as servants under the lordship of Christ” (p. 79). The author describes this process of equipping others as (a) selection, (b) association, (c) consecration and impartation, (d) demonstration, (e) delegation, (f) supervision, (g) reproduction, and (h) encouragement. A key component in this process is also attention to the vision, mission, covenant, and values statements of the church given through training and annual congregational retreats.

Reeder (2008) offered 10 practical “revitalization strategies” for leaders to pursue in fostering church renewal. Five of those strategies are context specific to church work: (a) remain gospel-driven and Christ-centered, (b) emphasize personal and family spiritual

formation, (c) prioritize intercessory prayer, (d) establish the primacy of preaching from God's word, and (e) commit to the direction of the Great Commission. Five others however, though stated in theological terminology, offer trans-contextual relevance as leadership strategies in all organizations.

First, Reeder (2008) asserted that organizations should learn from the past, in order to live in the present, so that it can change the future. Leaders should rehearse the stories of vibrancy and vitality that defined the "glory days" of the church in order to gain momentum and enthusiasm for experiencing such success again. Second, the author proposed that the pastor and leaders present a call to repentance, acknowledging that there are sins and mistakes that led to the current state of decline and modeling ownership and regret over those mistakes in order to "right the course."

Third, this turnaround pastor asserted that each congregation must stay on mission with a vision, understanding mission as its purpose, and vision as its passion. According to Reeder (2008), the mission of every church is unique to the situation in which they are placed and is discerned by asking the who, what, where, how, and why questions about the things a congregation does. To develop the vision, the author posits that the church should consider the pastor's strengths, weaknesses, and calling; the contextual opportunities of the congregation; the ministries of other local churches; and the needs of the immediate community.

Fourth, servant leadership multiplication is what Reeder (2008) believed was the most neglected aspect of leadership for vitality. Leaders influence others to achieve a defined mission together, and great leaders continually reproduce themselves at every level of the organization by attracting, developing, empowering, and enabling others to

be leaders. That process includes education, embodiment, empowerment, and evaluation on the part of the leader who desires to grow others in the areas of character, content, and competency. And, lastly, the author suggested that the most effective context for such development is within small groups, working with several at a time to maximize the efficient use of the leader's time, while providing a support and accountability network for those who are being trained.

Moving beyond what some would see as “natural gifts” that a turnaround pastor would preferably have, Page (2008) outlined specific actions that these leaders can take to fuel the revitalization process. For the author, the renewal process begins with an accurate evaluation of the current situation, which would include analysis of traditions, structures, attitudes, and other hindrances that might be present. He then asserts that pastors must make a long-term commitment to the congregation, for meaningful change will occur only over long periods of time and with much patience and perseverance.

With those two components laid as foundation, the congregations that turn plateau or decline into growth, will begin to give sincere focus on ministries of evangelism, outreach, and worship. According to the author, the turnaround church must understand the needs of the community, develop expanding doors through which ministry opportunities may occur, and involve the entire congregation in some way in the work of spreading the Gospel. These churches develop people-centered ministries that focus on meeting the tangible needs of those outside of the church, rather than expending primary energy inwardly on membership maintenance ministries only. Finally, he asserted that shrinking churches fuel growth by a renewed focus on their worship services. Churches must seek to make their worship experiences more visitor-friendly—providing an open,

indigenous, relevant celebration that portrays a vivid picture of the transformed life of a believer who is committed to fulfilling the will and work of the Lord.

Recognizing that churches tend to plateau at predictable levels of attendance, typically around 200, 400, and 1,000, Towns, Wagner, and Rainer (1998) combined their study and expertise to compare growth barriers at the various levels and successful strategies used by growing congregations for overcoming those obstacles.

Wagner (1989) offered six observations to avoid stopping at the 200 barrier which include (a) staff for program and growth, (b) avoid becoming a single-cell church by providing multiple opportunities for adult fellowship groups, (c) equip the laity to do ministry, (d) establish the pastoral function as a rancher not a shepherd, (e) maintain room for growth within facilities, and (f) establish structures which allow for strong and visionary leadership.

Rainer (1989) offered a 10-point check-up for middle-size churches to break the 400 barrier which included (a) a pastoral priority for sermon preparation, (b) a praying people, (c) an outward focus, (d) a clear purpose of making disciples of Christ, (e) a focus on meeting the needs of outsiders, (f) a commitment to lay ministry, (g) high expectations of members, (h) a strong Sunday School, (i) a commitment to long-term ministry, and (j) a priority of evangelism.

Towns (1989) suggested that several factors contribute to the ability of a church to break the 1,000 barrier; however, he asserted that the one key ingredient to breaking the 1,000 barrier is the pastor-leader. To that end, he forwarded eight laws of leadership necessary for the pastor-leader to practice in order to facilitate growth beyond the plateau: (a) setting a vision of obeying the Great Commission, (b) rewarding those

activities which are in concert with the vision, (c) establishing credibility, (d) communicating effectively with the congregation, (e) maintaining accountability for ministry throughout the organization, (f) motivating members to reach the vision, (g) developing strategic problem-solving strategies, and (h) practicing informed decision making.

The three researchers, therefore, proposed several consistent strategies that are effective in spurring renewal regardless of church size. Those common themes include (a) committing to fulfilling the purpose of evangelizing unreached persons and making disciples of Christ; (b) actively equipping the laity to do ministry and participate in leadership; (c) providing structures for growing strong cells of relationships within the church; and (d) establishing the pastoral role as one of equipping, leading, and communicating a powerful vision for the church.

Nixon (2004) also described what he called “10 Steps for Leading a Church off the Plateau.” These actions of the turnaround pastor include (a) casting a compelling vision; (b) developing a concise mission statement; (c) mobilizing prayer partners; (d) developing a strategy for growth—which includes mobilizing laity, developing a vision team, expanding facilities for growth, starting multiple services, and focusing on outreach; (e) trusting God for finances—i.e., making decisions necessary for growth in faith that financing will follow; (f) focusing attention on outreach to lost people; (g) designing special events for evangelism; (h) developing and supporting ministries of caring; (i) starting new classes to meet multiple needs; and (j) using music and drama as outreach evangelistic opportunities.

Although his data sources were not specifically turnaround churches and the behaviors were not entirely descriptive of the pastors themselves, Barna (1999) presented a compilation of various research projects conducted by the Barna Research Group to illuminate the habits of “effective churches” in general. He defined effective churches as those which are excelling in six dimensions of ministry characterized in the Early Church: worship, evangelism, Christian education, community among the believers, stewardship, and serving the needy. He suggested that only 10-15 % of Protestant churches in the United States can be deemed highly effective. From those 30,000 to 50,000 churches he estimated to be highly effective, the researcher found consistent patterns that contributed to the success of those ministries.

By conducting interviews with pastors and laity in a large number of these effective churches, Barna (1999) presented nine beneficial habits that highly effective churches practiced: (a) ensuring that leaders direct the church; (b) structuring the church for impact; (c) building lasting, significant relationships; (d) facilitating genuine worship; (e) engaging in strategic evangelism; (f) facilitating systematic theological growth; (g) practicing holistic stewardship; (h) serving the community; and (i) equipping the family. These habits are not merely habits of the pastor, yet they reflect conscientious action and serve to illumine the priorities of leadership within those churches.

Also not drawing from a story of church turnaround but successful church growth, Hamilton (2005) offered personal insights into factors that he considered essential in growing, under his leadership, a new United Methodist Church in Leawood, Kansas in 1990 to a current congregation of more than 13,000 adults and children. The author connected growth in churches to the real world and used a sales metaphor to describe

seven things without which it would be almost impossible for a church to grow. Hamilton suggested that the pastor, church leaders, and members must (a) believe in the product (Jesus Christ), (b) believe people need the product they are selling, (c) understand the needs of those they are seeking to reach, (d) offer an excellent product or service, (e) embody the values and ideals of the product, (f) effectively market the product, and (g) not give up in the face of adversity or rejection.

Rainer (2005) conducted an investigation to discover how some churches in the United States moved from being good to what he termed “breakout” churches. Following the research methodology used by Jim Collins (2001) with Fortune 500 companies and recorded in *Good to Great*, Rainer’s research team compared 13 churches ($n = 13$) which met the criteria as breakout churches with a comparison group of 39 churches ($n = 39$) which did not meet that standard, to discern factors which distinguished the two groups. The criteria for being a breakout church were (a) a minimum of 26 conversions in at least 1 of the past 5 years of record, (b) the ratio of worship attendees or membership (whichever was higher) to conversions could be no higher than 20:1 for at least 1 of the past 5 years, (c) the church must have experienced a decline in worship attendance in past years followed by a sustained period of growth of at least 5 years, and (d) the decline, breakout, and growth all had to take place under the same pastor.

The group began with data from 52,333 churches from cooperating denominations and responses to 117 inquiries to key church and denominational leaders. The evangelistic screenings of the first two criteria reduced the number to 1,936 churches. Only 881 of those churches responded to requests for at least 10 years of statistical data. Application of the third criteria narrowed the field to 211 churches. Of

those 211, only 17 did not have a change in the senior pastor that precipitated the growth. Rainer's (2001) research team gathered historical documents from those 17 churches, interviewed laypeople and staff people, and conducted on-site visits. In this process, they discovered that the team was given incomplete or inaccurate information and four of the churches did not meet the previous criteria, leaving them with 13 churches for the study.

The team established a control group of comparison churches, three for each breakout church, for comparative analysis. The comparison churches (a) had average worship attendance within 10% of the breakout church at a point prior to the breakout growth of the breakout church; (b) were located in the same or in a contiguous state of the breakout churches; (c) had similar demographics, including community population within 20% of each other; and (d) possessed similar doctrines, typically belonging to the same denomination. The more intensive research on the 13 breakout churches included mining of internal and historical documents and published materials, interviewing staff and laity, visiting the churches, testing Jim Collins' (2001) key principles with the churches, and comparing the results with the research on the comparison churches.

Rainer (2005) found six major components present in the breakout churches that distinguished them from the comparison churches. First, the senior pastors displayed what he called "Acts 6/7 Leadership." Those leaders possessed a strong sense of calling to their profession and were contributing, outwardly-focused, passionate, and bold. Additionally, they developed the capacity for equipping others for ministry while deflecting recognition for themselves—they possessed "confident humility." Second, breakout churches experienced an "ABC Moment," characterized by an "awareness" that something is not right with the church, a "belief" that a wide gap exists between what is

and what God intends, and a “crisis” point where leaders count the cost of change and accept its price.

Third, the breakout churches sought to discover the purpose of the church and brought the right kind of people on board to move the church to a more purpose-driven model. Fourth, church leaders inductively discovered the vision for the church through the intersection and analysis of the leader’s passion; the needs of the community; and the gifts, abilities, talents, and passions of the congregation. That vision formed core values, which in turn became the benchmark against which ministry decisions were made. Fifth, these 13 churches developed cultures which demanded excellence in all aspects of its ministries. And, sixth, breakout leaders introduced innovation slowly and with discernment, as tools of acceleration for the mission they were already pursuing (Rainer, 2005).

Summary

The turnaround literature provides lists of behaviors of pastors that contributed to successful turnaround and church growth that varied greatly in terminology and content. However, there was significant agreement from many of the studies, and they provide us with a helpful picture of the priorities of the turnaround leader.

First, these studies reveal consistent attention to shaping, selling, communication of and organization around a collective vision for the church, a sense of melding the “me” into a “we” approach that provides an identity to the congregation and focuses their attention towards reaching set goals (Crandall, 1995; Frazee, 1995; Herrington et al., 2000; Mathison, 1992; Nixon, 2004; Reeder, 2008). That vision begins by stirring a discontent within the church of the current state of affairs, coupled with a strong sense of

hope and excitement about where the church can be. This shares common priority with Kouzes and Posner's (2002) practice of inspiring a shared vision by envisioning the future and enlisting others.

Only one used the terms "developing momentum," but many noted that these leaders provided short term goals and opportunities for success that fostered a sense of excitement about the overall vision to which they aspired. The pastors worked with leadership to celebrate victories and to reward those actions which moved them closer to their vision (Barna, 1993; Easum, 2007; Goodwin, 1999; Herrington et al., 2000; Rainer, 2005; Russell, 2004; Schaller, 1981; Towns et al., 1998). These share almost identical terminology with Kouzes and Posner's (2002) commitments of generating small wins and celebrating values and victories that are part of challenging the process and encouraging the heart.

Another almost unanimous finding of these researchers was that a key to organizational turnaround was an outward focus (Decker & Griesinger, 1997; Page, 2008; Rainer & Lawless, 2003; Schaller, 1981; Towns et al., 1998). Many outside the church might consider the term "outreach" to be inclusive of spiritual and social ministries. But, these studies suggested a distinct commitment to a two-pronged commitment to evangelism and to meeting the needs of the community around those churches. Turnaround pastors consider these separate, though sometimes complementary, functions that are both essential to congregational renewal. A commitment to evangelism is driven by the conviction that others need what church members already have and is followed by a development of ministries to share that message and opportunity to become

a part of Christ's church (Barna, 1999; Easum, 2007; Nixon, 2004; Patton, 2002; Sims, 1992; Stetzer & Dodson, 2007; Towns et al., 1998).

Equally important, and often a contributory function to the church's goal of evangelism, is the church's commitment to discover and meet the physical, social, and spiritual needs of the target population they seek to reach or the population of which they are a part. Turnaround leaders have discovered that people maintain motivation when they mobilize their talents and believe they have a purpose that is making a difference in the lives of others. These pastors, therefore, strive to keep a congregational focus beyond themselves and develop ministries that contribute positively to the communities of their congregations in tangible ways (Avery, 2002; Barna, 1999; Mann, 1999; Mathison, 1992).

To that end, although turnaround pastors possess a higher than average work ethic (Rainer, 2001; Wood, 2001), they have discovered that they cannot grow a church alone. These leaders possess a commitment to equipping and involving the laity in ministry, to sharing in the leadership and responsibility for turnaround. They encourage their churches to engage in self-analysis to ascertain the talents and gifts they have, then they seek to develop ministries that enable the membership to become actively involved in meeting the needs of the church and of those outside the church (Avery, 2002; Hamilton, 2005; Herrington et al., 2000; Nixon, 2004; Patton, 2002; Sims, 1992;). More than that, they develop cultures that expect high membership commitment. These pastors understand that the skills lay people need are not intrinsic, but rather must be developed; they spend a proportionally larger portion of their time preparing others to do the ministry of the church. Turnaround leaders focus on developing other leaders and work through

their teams to accomplish the work of revitalization (Decker & Griesenger, 1997; Harding, 2007; Rainer, 2001; Rainer, 2005; Reeder, 2008; Stetzer & Dodson, 2007; Towns et al., 1998). Kouzes and Posner's (2002) practice of enabling others to act incorporates this notion by strengthening others through sharing power and discretion, developing competence and confidence, and fostering accountability and collaboration within the organization.

Turnaround pastors in these studies almost uniformly expressed a commitment to high expectations and excellence in the ministries in which they engage (Barna, 1993; Rainer, 2001). This literature suggested that most turnaround congregations do not try to do everything, but rather by engaging in evaluation and refinement of their programs, needs analysis, and self analysis, these churches focus their ministries in specific areas and develop those ministries with excellence (Frazee, 1995; Rainer, 2005; Reeder, 2008; Sims, 1992). Kouzes and Posner (2002) believed this was done as high expectations are reinforced through recognition and appreciation of the values the organization embraces. These churches place high emphasis on the quality of their worship services, insisting that services are indigenous to the people to whom they minister and that the services reflect a commitment to its value (Harding, 2007; Mathison, 1992; Page, 2008; Patton, 2002). They seek to be biblically centered, yet relevant to the everyday lives of those in the congregation, while also communicating a sincerity and authenticity from their lives. Turnaround pastors spend many more hours in sermon preparation, believing that their words are crucial to communicating the vision, moving their congregations to ministry, and impacting the lives of the listeners (Rainer, 2001; Stetzer & Dodson, 2007; Towns et al., 1998).

While there were many other behaviors that were unearthed in several studies—such as a commitment to personal and corporate prayer ministries (Rainer & Lawless, 2003; Reeder, 2008), attention to personal spiritual formation and vitality (Easum, 2007; Herrington et al., 2000), and the development of quality youth and children’s ministries (Frazee, 1995)—one other behavior was evident across the literature. In many situations, the pastor may not have complete power to effect it, but it is clear that turnaround leadership requires a long-term commitment from both the pastor and the congregation (Crandall, 2008; Mathison, 1992; Page, 2008; Rainer & Lawless, 2003; Schaller, 1981; Towns et al., 1998). Some studies suggest that significant growth does not occur until after the fourth year, while many others suggest that the most fruitful years of ministry occur between the seventh and eleventh years of the pastor’s tenure. Some leaders may be terminated before they reach that point because congregations may not have the “stomach” for the necessary changes. However, if given the opportunity, pastors must endure the struggles and frustrations and make a long term commitment to a congregation if the turnaround is to be successful.

Summary

The need for organizational renewal in educational and church settings has been well-documented. The dominant research paradigm—on school reform within educational institutions and on church revitalization in the church growth movement within seminaries—has not generally been to publish what is wrong in ineffective schools and churches, but rather to highlight the common practices and priorities of those who are in fact producing results in settings where others have not.

The vast majority of our nation's youth will be educated through the public and community school systems, some of which began their mission almost 2 centuries ago. Many of these systems have been mired in mediocrity for decades and have shown few signs of changing the course of their histories. Most of these school systems do not have magnet or charter options, rather they must operate with the population they have been given and the school which already exists and transform the results. Therefore, the need to study those who are operating in rural, sometimes isolated settings and who are indeed producing student success still exists. The contingent nature of leadership demands that a broader knowledge of contextual applications of generally accepted theory emerge, that behaviors that can be reproduced are reproduced, and that the priorities of effective principals become contagious.

Research indicates that principals can have a profound affect upon student achievement, albeit indirectly through casting visions and creating cultures that promote student learning. Because other research has shown that teacher satisfaction and pedagogical quality does have a significant impact on student achievement, and this body of research suggests that principals can positively affect teacher satisfaction, quality, and feeling of self-efficacy, it can be inferred that principals can impact student learning through their efforts to improve their faculties (Hipp, 1996; Keedy & Simpson, 2002; Lucas & Valentine, 2002).

The 21st Century has yet to produce a dominant paradigm to describe the effective leader. Change is the word that will seem to guide our educational systems; therefore, it would seem appropriate that the paradigms evolve as well. The accountability which demands ever-improving student outcomes, suggests that elements of the instructional

leadership movement will remain in principal preparation programs. The effective principal will be active in the development of effective pedagogy. Likewise, the realization that one person cannot possibly possess the intellectual capital necessary to remain vital will keep elements of transformational leadership in the forefront as well. Successful leaders will develop structures that promote the development of leaders and ideas from within. Discomfort also accompanies change, as the comfortable cultures that gave meaning to actions come under attack. The effective leaders will likewise have to be skillful in working within and transforming school cultures (Fullan, 2002; Hallinger & Heck, 1998).

No leader will possess all desirable qualities, and some personality traits and characteristics may be more useful in some contexts over others. Yet, some character traits seem essential to building a successful school. Effective leaders seem to possess an unusual passion for their work, a moral conviction that what they do really matters. These leaders have good people skills, and they sincerely care about and empathize with people around them. These exemplars are skilled at building and maintaining relationships and are effective communicators. They earn people's trust because they walk their talk—daily modeling a persistent optimism about the ability of others to accomplish great things (Davis, 1998; Goertz, 2000; Kirby, Paradise, & King, 1992; Koehler, Wallbrown, & Konnert, 1994; Larhi, 2003; Schneider & Carns, 1998; Tate, 2003).

The research also suggests that there are certain behaviors which, when used regularly and effectively, can be predictors of success and higher student achievement. Effective leaders cast a vision for the school and create energy to attain group goals. These principals maintain high expectations for themselves, their faculties, and their

students and promote an environment that appreciates learning. Effective principals understand change, and understand that they must devote extra effort to increasing the flow of information and fostering good lines of communication between all stakeholders. Change also requires innovation, and effective administrators create safe environments that champion risk-taking and questioning the status quo. The reform movement of the 1990s ushered in the new era of collaborative decision making, and those pace-setter principals understand they need the collective intellectual capital of their entire school to remain at the forefront (Barth, 2002; Fried, 1999; Fullan, 2006; Hipp, 1996; Jason, 2000; Kouzes & Posner, 1995; Leithwood, 1992; Lontos, 1993; Railsback, Reed & Boss, 2001; Wendell, Hoke, & Joekel, 1993).

Thousands of established churches have likewise found themselves searching for guidance as they are mired in states of plateau or decline. Hunter (1996) notes that changing population dynamics, the increased mobility of our society, the rise of secularity, the information and technology boom of the last 2 decades, and the emergence of the mega-church during the lifespan of Generation X have changed the methods and philosophies of Christian ministries in the United States. Churches have discovered that they no longer are the cultural and social center of the community; rather, they have been forced to create bodies that are culturally indigenous and relevant to the daily lives of the unchurched (Hunter, 1992). Church-goers have discovered that they do have “options,” and most have the financial wherewithal and patience to travel the necessary distance to find the church they desire.

Understandably, the vast majority of church growth literature is focused on the mega-churches, “target population” churches, and innovative churches that have

experienced significant growth. Denominational and progressive leaders quickly realized that a large number of those successful churches were relatively new congregations—those who chose to invent themselves rather than re-invent themselves. Therefore, with good reason, church organizations have poured vast resources and focused many of their best leaders on new church development efforts that yield higher “investment returns.” The question remains, however, “What do these denominations do with the tens of thousands of rural congregations that were often much more than just the backbone of those denominations?” To many of these mainline organizations, they represent the validation of their fulfillment of the Great Commission command decades ago to “go and make disciples.”

Is there a future for these congregations? Many church leaders, by neglecting those congregations and by focusing their energies on new church plants and population centers, have displayed their conviction that these churches should be allowed to die a natural death. Others, who hold convictions that these congregations represent the heart and purity of their denominations, have begun to study those few who have been successful at changing the direction of declining congregations, in hopes of training others to reproduce those principles and practices of revitalization in small, rural, established churches.

The work and ministry of a growing church is hardly a one-person effort. However, research indicates that the single most important person in the work of church turnaround is the pastor. Whether it is the strong work ethic, quality sermons, doctrinal clarity, love for people, or strong leadership skills, formerly unchurched people, church members, and pastors jointly attest that the actions of the pastor have profound effect on

the attitudes, direction, and growth of a congregation (Avery, 2002; Barna, 1993; Rainer, 2001; Stetzer & Dodson, 2007).

Turnaround pastors seem to answer the question of a paradigm for leadership by the fact that they seem so reluctant to give one. Rather than take time to think in the abstract, these leaders seem bent towards action. They are task-oriented, goal-oriented, and visionary (Crandall, 1995; Goodwin, 1999; Rainer, 2001; Reeder, 2008; Russell, 2004); but, they are most concerned in producing tangible results, and they understand it is their charge to move their voluntary force to bring forth that fruit. They possess a stronger than average work ethic, seemingly gaining energy from their work, which they seem to do for 10-15 hours more per week than those in comparison churches.

Turnaround pastors seem to excel at strategic thinking, especially in navigating through the processes of change, possessing enough self-confidence to be able to share leadership and building capacity in others. They care for people and live the example of the church they desire to create (Barna, 1993; Crandall, 1995; Frazee, 1995; Nixon, 2004; Page, 2008; Rainer, 2001; Rainer & Lawless, 2003; Wood, 2001).

Clear consistencies were noted in the prioritized behaviors of those pastors affecting turnaround in their congregations. Having a clear, viable vision as an organizational point was not enough in itself; these pastors were intentional about selling and shaping that vision within the church, providing short- and long-term goals which helped develop a momentum for change. The pastors kept their congregations focused beyond themselves, developing both elements of outreach—a strong evangelism emphasis and a commitment to meet the physical and social needs of the communities which they serve (Avery, 2002; Barna, 1993; Crandall, 1995; Decker & Griesinger, 1997;

Easum, 2007; Frazee, 1995; Goodwin, 1999; Herrington et al., 2000; Mann, 1999; Mathison, 1992; Nixon, 2004; Page, 2008; Patton, 2002; Rainer, 2005; Rainer & Lawless, 2003; Reeder, 2008; Russell, 2004; Schaller, 1981; Sims, 1992; Stetzer & Dodson, 2007; Towns et al., 1998).

As has been noted, turnaround pastors are not lazy, but they understand the need to equip and involve the laity in ministry, and they are intentional in their time and energy commitments in delineating and developing the talents, gifts, and leadership abilities of others. They develop churches with high expectations of their members, and they are very intentional about the ministries they develop through the work of the church. They insist on quality in their endeavors over quantity, especially their worship services, and spend proportionally larger amounts of time in sermon preparation than do comparison church pastors. These pastors have made long term commitment to their congregations, understanding that effective, lasting change takes persistence and patience (Avery, 2002; Barna, 1993; Crandall, 2008; Decker & Griesenger, 1997; Easum, 2007; Frazee, 1995; Hamilton, 2005; Harding, 2007; Herrington et al., 2000; Mathison, 1992; Nixon, 2004; Page, 2008; Patton, 2002; Rainer, 2001; Rainer, 2005; Rainer & Lawless, 2003; Reeder, 2008; Schaller, 1981; Sims, 1992; Stetzer & Dodson, 2007; Towns et al., 1998; Wood, 2001).

With the exception of a leadership paradigm, which rightfully seems to be context-contingent, the similarities of successful transformational leaders in schools and turnaround leaders in churches are striking. Research in both fields indicate the positive impact that leaders can exert, and the character dynamics of those school and church leaders delineated in the literature would almost suggest that they were studying the same

people. Likewise, the lists of overt behaviors that bring about revitalization in both settings contain consistent sets of actions, which suggests that successfully leading people may in many respects be cross-contextual—that gaining insights from a study of turnaround leadership in a church setting may provide benefit to a larger population of leaders seeking to bring about organizational renewal. This also supports the notion of Kouzes and Posner (2002) that effective leadership principles have not changed over time, rather the context requires the adaptation of the core practices of exemplary leadership.

This chapter has provided a brief overview of the literature that details the tenets of transformational leadership in schools and highlighted their similarities with the basic components of turnaround leadership in churches. This study delineated the research findings that supported an evidence of leader impact in school and churches, the paradigms for transformational and turnaround leadership, the attributes of the successful transformational leader in a school and the successful turnaround leader in a church, and the specific behaviors that contributed positively to leading a school or church through a transition from plateau and decline to sustained growth and success.

Chapter III will provide a description of the site that was the subject of study for this inquiry as well as an overview of the methodology utilized within the study. The chapter will describe the criteria for site selection, the research participants, the methods of data collection, and the methods used for data analysis that included considerations to strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings for the reader of the final report.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study seeks to identify successful practices of turnaround leaders in a rural church that are applicable cross-contextually, so as to inform the leadership efforts of various organizations seeking to reproduce organizational renewal on a wide-scale basis. The landscape of the United States is checkered with thousands of small, dying, rural churches. These once-thriving congregations possess little of the original vision with which they were birthed and are mired in plateau or decline (Page, 2008; Wood, 2001). Death for these congregations, however, is not an absolute certainty. There are congregations that have reversed their paths, have returned from the brink of death, and have experienced periods of growth and revitalization of ministries (Easum, 2007; Harding, 2007; Mathison, 1992; Patton, 2002; Reeder, 2008; Russell, 2004; Sims, 1992). This turnaround phenomenon is not the norm, but it has occurred with sufficient frequency that researchers have begun to study the habits and behaviors of these groups of believers and their leaders to ascertain whether these behaviors may be replicated in various settings. Small, struggling churches exist in many rural communities and country sides; however, few studies have targeted the unique dynamics of accomplishing turnaround in non-urban settings or on cross-contextual similarities of accomplishing organizational renewal in schools and churches. Crandall's (1995) work is one of a very few works that have targeted small church turnaround, yet that study still did not focus

specifically on rural church issues. The researcher examined a turnaround church located in an area that meets both lifestyle and population definitions of a rural area to seek and discover factors that led to revitalization in that setting.

This chapter outlines the processes utilized to examine a turnaround phenomenon in a rural church in central Kentucky and to discover perceived triggers for the revitalization that may have value as strategies in other locations. This chapter will lay out the research perspective, type of research methodology, details of the context and participants, an overview of the instruments and procedures used for data collection, and strategies utilized for data analysis by the researcher.

Research Perspective

Proceeding with the assumption that leaders can, by the practice of specific, intentional behaviors, positively impact the ability of a congregation to reverse its path and experience turnaround, and seeking to illuminate those behaviors, this study was guided by the following research questions:

- 1) In a rural church that has experienced revitalization (“organizational turnaround”), how do the pastor and congregants perceive the experience?
- 2) How do they perceive the characteristics and behaviors of the pastor as “catalysts” in this transformation?
- 3) What leadership principles of successful turnaround church efforts can be extracted from their experiences that are comparable to those reported in the literature on school revitalization efforts?

Research Approach

This qualitative research inquiry was guided by the principles of case study research. This is the preferred method “when how or why questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (Yin, 1994, p. 1), especially appropriate when the case represents a test of existing theory, or in this case a comparison of existing literature in school and church turnaround literature. Others (Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994) support the notion that case studies occur in a bounded context, because there is a finite number of persons who could be interviewed or to observations that could be conducted, as is evident in the phenomenon of a single church study. Stake (1995) emphasizes that case study is appropriate when “the case is a specific, complex, functioning thing” (p. 2).

Simple cause and effect relationships are difficult, if not impossible, to identify in phenomena involving the complicated interactions of human beings and the organizations they comprise. Therefore, the examination of multiple variables through multiple sources of evidence—including interviews, document mining, artifacts, and observations—was appropriate, allowing theories to emerge from the analysis and triangulation of the data (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998).

Whereas case study design offers rich insight into theoretical propositions, it does not represent a sample population of the whole; therefore, the results of this study will not be generalizable to specific populations or offer prediction for settings that may include a variety of other variables. However, the time spent in the field by the researcher, the use of detailed, thick description in this report, and the closeness to and interactions with the

participants in the study provide opportunity for verification of findings that may be lacking in quantitative studies (Creswell, 1998) and thus may provide some opportunities for transferability for the reader with those churches who share similar stories.

The Role of the Researcher

As a student completing degree requirements in the cooperative doctoral program between Western Kentucky University and the University of Louisville, the researcher served as the primary tool for inquiry in this study. The researcher has a varied work background which has included serving in six different churches as pastor, interim pastor, and currently youth pastor over the last 22 years. He also has completed 13 years of full-time experience in five different high schools as a teacher, administrator and now principal. His educational background includes an undergraduate degree in accounting and math and graduate degrees in education, divinity, world mission and evangelism, and school administration.

The researcher is an ordained minister in the same denomination as the case study site—a small, predominantly Southeastern denomination. The researcher possessed some familiarity of the church, the area, and the pastor, having served as pastor at churches in the same presbytery both during the period of plateau and decline and during the first years of the turnaround pastor's tenure.

As is the case in most qualitative study, the researcher served as the primary instrument for this study. He collected the observation data, performed the applicable document mining, and conducted the interviews of those who had experienced the turnaround process. The researcher also performed the data analysis and wrote the final report which presents the findings of this study.

Research Context

As has been previously stated in Chapter I, the researcher defined a “turnaround church” as one that had experienced an extended period of at least 5 years of decline or plateau in membership and attendance, but had then enjoyed a period of at least 3-5 years of significant growth in membership, attendance, program, vision, and enthusiasm. Additionally, the congregation must have experienced significant growth from professions of faith and new members, rather than transfer growth of those who may have already been attending congregational services at another location.

As an ordained minister in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church denomination, the researcher possessed statistical data for that denomination since 1993 and studied membership trends of the almost 800 congregations within the denomination from 1993-2009. Data on active membership totals, Sunday School membership, professions of faith, and membership gains of the denomination’s congregations revealed two congregations that met the criteria for sustained growth—both in excess of 10 years—and significant growth through professions of faith rather than transfer growth.

Site 1, located in Southwest Tennessee, experienced active membership growth of 260% (from 173 to 449) and Sunday School growth of 159% (from 190 to 302) from its lowest point during that 16-year span to the 2009 figures. Site 2, located in South-central Kentucky, experienced active membership growth of 289% (from 118 to 341) and Sunday School growth of 325% (from 83 to 270) from its lowest point to the same 2009 figures. Both sites experienced significant growth through professions of faith as a percentage of total growth. Site 1 had 46% of its growth occur through new believers during that time span, while Site 2 had 52% growth through profession of faith.

A marked difference, however, existed in the patterns of growth that occurred during this statistical period. Site 1 experienced only 1 year of decline in active membership from the previous year during that period, which seemed from the data to have indicated a “cleaning up” of the church roll rather than a noticeable decline, as this was also the year with the highest number of professions of faith and second highest number of new members during that study period. In other words, Site 1—who has had the same pastor throughout this study period—experienced no period of sustained decline between 1993 and 2009. In contrast, however, Site 2—who had three pastors during this 16-year period—experienced 3 years of essentially no active membership gain and a decline in Sunday School participation from 1993 to 1995. In 1996, Site 2 lost 26% of its active membership and 29% of its Sunday School enrollment to numbers (118 and 83, respectively), a phenomenon that only began to significantly change course 2 years later. Thus, Site 2 seemed to better fit the definition of a “turnaround congregation,” as this congregation had experienced sustained, significant growth for a period exceeding 10 years, after a five-year period of plateau and marked decline from 1993-1997.

As the other goal of this study was to examine growth in a rural setting, the researcher had to establish criteria for a congregation being “rural.” The U.S. Office of Management and Budget (Rural Assistance Center, n.d.) provides a simple definition of rural as an area that is beneath the threshold of both metropolitan (at least 50,000 population) and micropolitan (at least 10,000 population but less than 50,000). However, in “defining” areas of the country that are eligible for funding and programming as rural areas, the OMB generally utilizes a “non-metropolitan” threshold in characterizing areas as rural, classifying non-metro counties as rural based upon census places and census

urban areas with a population less than 50,000 and upon rural-urban commuting areas that account for the suburban sprawl of larger cities.

Site 1 was located in a distinctly rural setting, not a part of any incorporated town or within a few miles of any other public structures or businesses. The church sat in an area defined as rural by “census places” (< 10,000 population) and “census urban areas.” However, this site was in a county that was defined as a metro county and as urban based by rural-urban commuting area, based upon its proximity to Memphis, TN. Site 2 was located in a town whose population of 13,000 seems to violate the non-metropolitan or non-micropolitan population standard. However, this site was located in an area defined by the OMB as a non-metro county, as rural based upon census places and census urban areas with a population less than 50,000, and upon rural-urban commuting areas. Additionally, the county in which this church exists was designated as “The Best Place to Live in Rural America” by *The Progressive Farmer* (Link, 2009).

Though neither site was a perfect fit for the criteria established for a rural, turnaround congregation, both hold the essential characteristics of a church that would contribute to the goals of the study. However, because Site 2 experienced the period of plateau and decline and a distinct turnaround within the study period, and because that turnaround phenomenon can be studied in the entirety of its current pastor’s tenure, Site 2 was further confirmed as the site selected for this study.

The congregation site selected for this study is located in a town in South-central Kentucky, approximately 1½ hours northwest of Nashville, TN. The county has a population of 38,000 spread over its rolling hills and rich farmlands. A state park situated around a large, man-made lake and a national park that contains the world’s largest cave

system provide a lucrative tourist industry for the county. The town holds a yearly festival which honors its ties to a sister city in Scotland and draws thousands of visitors for its cultural activities and ancient competitive games. Although the church is located in a town larger than the 10,000 population threshold defined by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) as a “rural” town, the county itself is defined by the OMB as rural based upon census place, outside census urban areas, and rural-urban commuting areas and as a non-metro county.

New Life Church (fictitious name), the site for the study, was organized in 1959 and enjoyed steady growth through the 1960’s primarily under a charismatic pastor who helped shape a body that was loosely connected to its denomination. That same pastor became discontented in 1973 and left the church, along with two-thirds of its active members and began a new church. Two decades later, the original congregation had stabilized, but had experienced a prolonged plateau and had grown little to an active membership of 140. A rocky 2-year pastorate led to another decline down to a low of 118 active members, with just 83 enrolled in its Sunday School program, and worship attendance as low as 50. Ironically, it was the independent church begun in the split over 2 decades earlier that produced the individual that New Life would call as its “leader” during those troublesome times. “Jim” was a gifted musician who helped with the local high school band and who was serving as youth minister at the independent church. Although he possessed a master’s degree in music, he did not possess the educational requirements necessary for ordination in the denomination to which New Life belonged, so he began a full-time pastorate as a part-time student in a seminary 2 hours away.

New Life began a period of significant growth in Jim's third year as pastor, gaining 41 new members, 16 of which were by profession of faith. The congregation grew by about 20 members yearly for the next 6 years, outgrowing their facility and constructing a new 1.2 million dollar sanctuary in 2004. Since moving into its new sanctuary, New Life has expanded to two worship services, averages 280 in worship, has a Sunday School membership of 270 and an active membership of 341. The researcher visited New Life in October 2010, at a time when the congregation had then experienced a decade of steady growth and expansion of ministries.

The researcher completed the necessary on-line training for research involving human subjects, and after gaining approval of the study proposal by his dissertation committee, he completed the human subjects review board applications for the Institutional Review Boards of the University of Louisville and Western Kentucky University. After gaining approval, the researcher contacted the pastor and secured his willingness to participate in the study, who in turned secured the permission and willingness of the church session to participate. Understanding that the corporate worship experience would not only provide access to the "picture" of the total congregation that was available for study, but that it often represents the priorities of the congregation, the researcher scheduled observations to include multiple worship experiences over the course of several weekends. Additionally, the pastor aided the researcher in scheduling visits that would provide opportunity to observe session and staff meetings and provided access to church facilities for the researcher to conduct private interviews with research participants.

The researcher obtained permission of the pastor and church session to conduct participant-observations during worship services, staff meetings, a session meeting, and small group meetings that occurred during the researcher's on-site period. All interviewees gave informed consent to voluntarily participate in semi-structured, open-ended interviews conducted by the researcher and were aware that they were free to not answer any question they did not want to answer or to stop participation at any time (Diener & Crandall, 1978). The researcher preserved anonymity for all interviewees and did not share responses of others while on the field. Additionally, the use of fictitious names or no names were associated with direct quotes used in the final report (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). The researcher provided no monetary reciprocity for research participants, providing them only with the satisfaction of contributing to the good story of turnaround that had occurred in their congregation that might be of help to other leaders and congregations.

Research Participants

Upon initial arrival at the research site, the pastor introduced the researcher during the two Sunday morning worship services, where all congregants in attendance were asked to complete a questionnaire containing demographic information that guided the researcher to those in pre-determined groups who would provide the desired information. The participants as delineated below were selected randomly from those questionnaires, and each completed a consent form indicating their willingness to be interviewed and to participate in the study.

Pastor

As the leader of New Life congregation during the turnaround phenomenon, and as the one who provided the leadership behaviors that this study sought to delineate, the pastor was a primary source of information. Pastor Jim was utilizing his musical talent as an assistant band director for the local high school and serving as youth pastor of the independent church that had split from New Life Church two decades prior to his being called as stated supply pastor—a denominational title that allowed him to preach and perform other pastoral duties but could not perform baptisms, lead in celebrations of communion, or preside as moderator of the congregation—at New Life. Jim did not possess the necessary educational credentials to become ordained in the denomination to which New Life belonged, so he enrolled in seminary classes 2 hours away upon becoming the New Life pastor in 1996. Jim attended seminary part-time and completed his seminary studies ten years later and was then ordained in 2009, then officially able to serve as “pastor” of the congregation after leading it for 13 years.

Church Staff

New Life Church has three part-time ministry assistants and a church secretary. Whereas the youth minister had been on staff less than two months and possessed little knowledge of the church dynamics at the time when the researcher arrived, he was not interviewed as part of this study. Each of the remaining staff members agreed to participate in the study and were interviewed. “Richard” serves the church as music minister and director of the church choir and joined the church staff in 2004. “Frank” is a retired pharmacist, who is also an ordained minister in the same denomination as New Life Church. He serves the church as a ministry assistant while also serving as pastor of a

small rural church in the same county as New Life. He and his wife are the only remaining charter members of the congregation and came back to his hometown in 2002 after serving as senior pastor of three healthy, growing churches. “Susan” has been the church secretary for 13 years. She handles much of the daily business of the church while serving as a resource for the other staff members and church elders. While none of these staff members was present for the turnaround phenomenon, they provided valuable information about Jim’s leadership style, priorities, and behaviors that have sustained growth within the congregation for 14 years.

Church Leaders

Elders are the elected representatives within the congregation who are charged with oversight and leadership of the entire ministry of New Life Church. Elders are ordained to serve within the local body and serve a 3-year term when elected to serve as an active member of the church session. Currently, the church session is comprised of nine elders serving actively. The researcher utilized the information gained from the questionnaires to discover elders who served before and during the turnaround process. A group of elders from that period gave their consent and granted the researcher an interview opportunity. In seeking to glean information from at least eight elders, the researcher also interviewed an additional three elders who had served since the turnaround phenomenon and during the period of growth and expansion of facilities that occurred in 2004.

Church Members

Utilizing the demographic information in the questionnaires, the researcher gained consent and interviewed five members—including two from other categories—who had

been a part of New Life Church since its inception and formative years in the early 1960's. These members had worked with every leader in the church's history, had experienced the split in 1973 and the plateau and decline of the early 90's, as well as the turnaround phenomenon, and provided valuable insight into Jim's distinguishing leadership behaviors that led to turnaround and sustained growth.

Additionally, the researcher located five members—who were not included in the previously mentioned groups—who had been a part of the congregation and had experienced the period of plateau and decline as well as the turnaround phenomenon. The researcher discovered their perceptions of behaviors that contributed to the change in direction of the congregation as well as those behaviors that spurred congregational growth.

Finally, the researcher identified and gained consent to interview seven members that had joined since 2004 to ascertain their reasons for becoming a part of New Life and to see if there was congruence in their perceptions of the positive leadership behaviors of their pastor and those identified by other members and leaders as those leading to and sustaining turnaround.

Data Collection

While on site, the researcher collected information from three primary sources. The researcher conducted participant observations in worship services, staff meetings, leadership meetings, and other public gatherings. Additionally, the researcher interviewed the pastor, staff, key leaders, and members who had experienced the turnaround of church fortune and gained valuable corroborating data from document mining.

Observations

After obtaining permission from the pastor and church leaders, the researcher conducted on-site participant-observations in order to gain a firsthand encounter with the church that had experienced the turnaround phenomenon and to build rapport with its members to facilitate honest sharing in the interviews that were to follow. The observations provided the researcher with the opportunity to notice things that had perhaps become routine to the participants themselves, to provide context for reference points for future interviews, and to provide a base of information for triangulating emerging findings from interviews and document analysis (Merriam, 1998). The researcher visited worship services on three separate weekends, observed staff and session meetings, and attended small group gatherings that occurred during the on-site period in order to substantiate the interview findings.

Interviews

Because the turnaround phenomenon had occurred prior to the arrival of the researcher, and because it was a process that occurred over a several-year period of time, person-to-person interviews were the most appropriate form of primary data collection in this study. Feelings, thoughts, intentions, meanings, and past behaviors are not items that could have been observed, therefore the researcher chose to devote significant time to interviews in order to discover the perspectives that existed in the minds of leaders and members (Patton, 1990). The researcher used an interview protocol approved by the Human Subjects Review Boards of the University of Louisville and Western Kentucky University to conduct semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders at New Life Church. The protocol contains open-ended questions about reasons for selecting and

staying at New Life, as well as perceptions of church priorities, strengths, weaknesses, constructive and destructive pastoral behaviors, key events that spurred and supported growth within the congregation, and the challenges before the congregation. The interviewees were not exposed to the interview protocol prior to the researcher's arrival for the study at the church. The utilization of open-ended questions within the interview processes provided the interviewees with great latitude to describe their own experiences and perceptions of precipitating factors of the turnaround, providing opportunity for the researcher to gather dependable data to compare to other documents, artifacts, and observations and glean valuable insights into possible correlational activities.

Because the interviewer is an ordained minister in that denomination, there were some interviewed that knew the researcher prior to the study; however, none had engaged in active ministry or experienced regular contact with the researcher in almost 10 years. The researcher took extensive notes, audio recorded interviews, and later transcribed those interviews, so that he could return and fill in gaps in his notes.

Document Mining

Another useful source of information was artifacts mined by the researcher during the fieldwork period. These were particularly helpful for verifying the findings of interviews and observations, as they were produced independent of this study and were not subject to the human lens of perception that is necessary for interviews and observations (Merriam, 1998). The researcher examined church session meeting minutes, newsletters and publications, belief and mission statements, teaching and sermon materials, and other artifacts to retrieve additional data. During the process of data

collection, the observer recorded comments and memos embedded within the notes to stimulate further inquiry and to begin the analysis process while still collecting the data.

Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis occur simultaneously in qualitative research (Merriam, 1998, p. 151). As data were collected, the researcher examined and categorized individual elements of information in the research notes, interview protocol responses, and physical artifacts. Documents were coded with two capital letters that were descriptive of the source or pseudonym for each person (i.e., SR=session records, WO=worship service, FR=Frank). Additionally, documents were sub-divided in subject or time period segments and numbered sequentially for easier identification. Citations in Chapter IV may also contain a date on which the data was collected or from which it originated, and notations as to whether it was from documents (do), field notes (fn), or transcripts (t). For example, a notation of (LU/t/9-26/12) would indicate: (a) Lunelle provided the information in an interview; (b) it is contained in the transcription of that interview; (c) the interview occurred on 9-26-2010; and (d) the information is in text segment 12.

From the first interviews and observations through the conclusion of the study, the researcher kept a journal of reflections, themes, ideas, things to look for in future observations, and questions to be asked of future interviewees. Through constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) of the available data sources, the researcher looked for opportunities to engage in pattern-matching, explanation-building, time-series analysis, and developing program logic models which help to establish

cause/effect relationships between the leader behaviors and their effects on turnaround (Yin, 1994).

The systematic process of data analysis (Creswell, 1998) began with open coding, whereby the researcher sorted the data that answered the research questions and formed preliminary, major categories of information about the turnaround process by segmenting information and began developing subcategories within the property or category. The researcher compared various findings to arrive at common themes that arose within those coding categories and compiled a list of behaviors that seemed to contribute to revitalization within the congregation. Axial coding began as the researcher identified central factors that contributed to the turnaround phenomenon, explored causal conditions, identified targeted strategies and intervening conditions, and noted the outcomes of those interventions. Finally, the researcher completed selective coding, whereby the story developed and the hypotheses about how these interventions and behaviors contributed to turnaround were proposed.

As those hypotheses emerged, the researcher sought to verify those findings (Creswell, 1998) through other data that were examined to see if a convergence of multiple sources existed so as to support those ideas through a triangulation of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of data refers to the justification for “paying attention to” the assertions based upon foundations of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This means that assertions flow from logical interpretations of the original data, that those assertions have applicability beyond the

research setting, that the research methodology was sound, and that the assertions were adequately supported. The researcher utilized multiple methods to ensure trustworthiness of the findings, including triangulation, a researcher journal record, member checks, thick, rich description, and maintaining an audit trail. On-site observation and engagement with the participants in the turnaround process provided multiple opportunities for the verification of research discoveries.

Triangulation

The triangulation of the various data sources occurred through making use of multiple and different sources to corroborate evidence that led to themes and perspectives in the study (Creswell, 1998). Interview responses were recorded and transcribed and compared with findings recorded through on-site observations and document mining. The researcher was alert to data which supported emerging hypotheses, but also gained additional insight from contradictory findings that forced additional inquiry about the relationship between certain behaviors and experienced results.

Journal Record

The researcher maintained a journal throughout the study process to record observations, analysis, and initial reactions to study findings. As new ideas about the setting, people, and events emerged in the data collection, those ideas were recorded in the journal, as well as commentary on unexpected happenings and possible connections between various data sources. The journal also provided the avenue for the researcher to record a fluid “roadmap” of the upcoming steps and reflections on developing codes that were utilized in data organization. As theories emerged, the researcher noted preliminary

categories in the margins while adding comments as to perceived connections with other data sources and noted areas that warranted further inquiry.

Member Checks

By taking data, analyses, and initial interpretations and conclusions back to the pastor and session members and giving them the opportunity to provide input as to the accuracy and credibility of findings (Stake, 1995), the researcher participated in member checks to aid in building the trustworthiness of the study findings (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998). Additionally, the researcher provided opportunity for those leaders to provide alternate language and provide critical observations of the research findings.

Thick, Rich Description

The final report includes a more holistic view of the leader and the setting in which turnaround occurred, providing detailed descriptions of events, settings, quotes, and artifacts. This use of rich, thick description in the final report provided the reader with the opportunity to make his or her own decisions regarding the transferability of the data based upon the existence of shared characteristics with a particular setting in which turnaround is desired (Erlandson, et al., 1993).

Maintenance of Audit Trail

The researcher maintained all observation notes, interview transcripts, documents, his journal, and other supporting evidence in a file in the researcher's home. All raw data were stored in those files and organized according to themes that emerged throughout the course of the study. The preservation of the raw data collected in this study provides opportunity for verification that the researcher reported findings that emerged from the interviews, observations, and documents from the research site.

The next chapter provides a detailed analysis of the data that were collected through the various means previously described. The chapter contains detail about processes for collection and analysis, as well as the actual pieces of evidence that became the source of the conclusions drawn in Chapter V, and the steps taken to insure reliability of findings. Since the primary purpose of this study is to discover behaviors that can be applied cross-contextually to contribute to turnaround efforts in other churches and school settings, the final chapter is organized so as to present the behaviors which seem to have contributed to the turnaround and New Life Church, and those behaviors that are consistent with the findings of other researchers, as presented in Chapter II, are highlighted for their potential cross-contextual value in contributing to turnaround.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter includes the findings from a qualitative study of leadership principles in a turnaround congregation in South-central Kentucky. Most mainline denominations find themselves at critical junctures with hundreds of churches that have been mired in plateau and decline for many years. With the uncomfortable decision of letting these churches die as the alternative, many pastors, seminaries, and denominational leaders are seeking to learn from those who have experienced success in revitalizing these dying congregations. Revitalization and renewal in these congregations are necessary if these churches are to survive, and studies of leaders in turnaround congregations have proven effective in providing useful information for others seeking to breathe new life into the congregations they pastor. This study illuminates the successful practices of a turnaround leader in a rural church that are applicable cross-contextually, so as to inform the leadership efforts of various organizations seeking to reproduce organizational renewal on a wide-scale basis.

Research Design Overview

The study sought answers to the following questions:

- 1) In a rural church that has experienced revitalization (“organizational turnaround”), how do the pastor and congregants perceive the experience?
- 2) How do they perceive the characteristics and behaviors of the pastor as “catalysts” in this transformation?

- 3) What leadership principles of successful turnaround church efforts can be extracted from their experiences that are comparable to those reported in the literature on school revitalization efforts?

This chapter contains findings from semi-structured interviews with 27 members of the congregation while in the field for eight days. The researcher interviewed three members of the church staff (two men, one woman), ten members who have served or are currently serving as elders in the congregation (all men – seven served prior to 1994), five persons who have been members virtually the entire 50-plus years of the congregation's life (three women, two men), five long-time members who have been a part of the congregation since before the plateau and decline of the 1990's (all women), and seven members who have joined the congregation since 2004 (four men, three women). Pseudonyms are used for each of the interviewees as an aid to protect anonymity of the direct quotes that are reported out in this section of the study.

Additionally, the researcher examined church session records from 1992 to the present; studied church newsletters and other publications from the last decade; conducted participant observations of worship services, fellowship activities, Sunday School and Wednesday night classes, youth and other special events, and one session meeting. A detailed description of the research setting that includes the community, the turnaround church, and the turnaround pastor opens the chapter. The chapter then describes the formation of the congregation as well as key leadership behaviors that contributed to the two splits and period of little growth that crippled the congregation prior to 1996. The researcher then presents data that appear to have contributed to laying a foundation for a distinct turnaround that began to occur in 1999. The remainder of this

chapter then delineates two personality components and five behaviors of the turnaround pastor that played a significant role in fueling and sustaining the turnaround to the present.

Case Study

Research Setting

The Community

The researcher studied a turnaround congregation in a South central Kentucky town of 13,000 residents but was located in an area defined by the Office of Management and Budget as a non-metro county and as rural, based upon census places and census urban areas with a population less than 50,000 and upon rural-urban commuting areas. Additionally, the county in which New Life Church and its pastor, Jim, minister was designated as “The Best Place to Live in Rural America” by *The Progressive Farmer* (Link, 2009). The county has a population of 38,000 spread over its rolling hills and rich farmlands. A state park situated around a large, man-made lake and a national park that contains the world’s largest cave system provide a lucrative tourist industry for the county, as does the town’s yearly festival, which honors ties to its sister city in Scotland, featuring cultural activities and ancient competitive games.

There are two public high schools located in the town—a “city” school that is operated by an independent school system and a “county” school that educates all the students in the remainder of the county. The city school has just over 500 students and has a strong tradition of superior academic and athletic programs, while also taking great pride in its marching band. That band won the 2010 Class A State Championship the weekend before the researcher’s last visit to the site. Their football team was state runner-

up in back-to-back years in 1999 and 2000 but has struggled in recent years—even having a winless season in 2008. The baseball team is generally considered one of the stronger teams in its region and won a regional championship in 2004. The boys basketball team produced one “Mr. Kentucky Basketball” in 2002. The county school serves almost 1300 students and was not known for strong academics until recent years, and it was quite significant when the school test scores were higher than the city school’s scores in recent years. The school now has a large Advanced Placement and dual credit program for their students that has drawn more of the top students that once attended the city school. The county school has not enjoyed the athletic tradition of the city school but would consider themselves a “basketball school,” consistently providing one of the top girls’ programs in the region that has won two regional titles in the last decade and a boys team that won a regional title in 1999.

The community also has a private, pre-school-through-12th grade Christian school within its city limits. The school is independent of any single church but is supported by many of the community churches. Jim’s two children are among the 163 students who attend the school, and he and Frank, New Life’s ministry assistant, both teach classes part-time for the school. The town also displays a strong tie to its local churches, and especially to the denomination to which New Life is associated, as the town’s mayor and two of its council members are ordained Cumberland Presbyterian ministers—including Frank and Jim.

New Life Church

New Life Church was organized in 1959 with 26 charter members. The church began meeting in homes in its formative years before securing the funds from its

presbytery to build a parsonage in which its pastor could live. When organized, the congregation was worshipping in the basement of that parsonage, which also had some areas partitioned off for Sunday School rooms. The church moved into its first sanctuary in 1962 and completed an educational addition in 1965. The congregation enjoyed rapid growth under its founding minister and reached Sunday attendance numbers near 280. However, New Life experienced an initial split in 1973, when its founding pastor left with nearly two-thirds of its membership. The church experienced two decades of little growth and plateau before enduring another sharp decline in attendance and participation between 1994-1996. Between 1992 and 1997, New Life had three pastors, and in 1996 lost 26% of its active membership and 29% of its Sunday School enrollment numbers (118 and 83, respectively) that only began to significantly change course in the third year of the current pastor's work with the congregation.

The congregation has now enjoyed 11 years of sustained growth and now exceeds attendance levels that existed prior to its split in 1973. New Life has experienced active membership growth of 289% (from 118 to 341) and Sunday School growth of 325% (from 83 to 270) during the period from 1993 to 2009, with 52% of that growth coming from professions of faith of new believers. The congregation added 21,000 square feet to its facilities when it moved into its new 1.2 million dollar, 600-seat sanctuary and 450-seat fellowship hall in 2004. Increased attendance prompted the addition of a second worship service in 2007 to each Sunday morning's schedule. With no seat further than 45 feet from the pulpit, the church was designed so that:

All seats focus around the communion table and pulpit. The sanctuary has several pillars throughout representing the heavenly temple. The focus of the room is a

large stained glass window, which depicts the River of Life flowing down from Heaven. At the base of the window a waterfall flows in front of the cross representing the instrument of God's grace flowing down to man. (DI/do/04/1)

The Turnaround Pastor

As the leader of New Life congregation during the turnaround phenomenon, and as the one who provided the leadership behaviors that this study sought to delineate, the pastor was a primary source of information. Although from West Virginia, Pastor Jim was a member of the band and graduated from the University of Kentucky where he met his wife, Amy, through a campus Christian organization. Amy was from a respected family in the New Life community, a connection that prompted the couple to return there after college.

Jim experienced church leadership intimately as a youth, as his grandfather was a minister. Additionally, Jim's parents had started a church when he was in high school. He had served for 3 1/2 years with the youth in a Disciples of Christ church right after college, followed by a year as a music minister in a Baptist church. Jim had been serving as associate pastor of "Covenant Church"—the independent church that had split from New Life Church two decades prior—for 5 1/2 years, at the same time he utilizing his musical talent as an assistant band director for the local high school. It was during this time that he was asked to consider coming to New Life. He was called as "stated supply pastor"—a denominational title that allowed him to preach and perform other pastoral duties but could not perform baptisms, lead in celebrations of communion, or preside as moderator of the congregation—at New Life in 1996. This was his first position as a senior pastor of any congregation, although he admits, "I had a lot of experience there, a

lot of opportunity to lead. They gave me a long leash. And I trained with a very good pastor” (JI/t/9-26/2).

One elder described Jim as “very talented, musical, education, personality...he just had it” (BC/t/10-27/8). When assessing his strengths, Jim shared,

There’s really no area of ministry that I haven’t done or can’t do. . . . I’m able to run sound. I’m able to do lighting. I designed the [new] building, you know, help plan and lead worship, design a website. I can do advertisements. Radio, TV, I can do those things. I wrote our VBS, all the songs of our VBS. I dressed up in character and taught our VBS. (JI/t/10-26/17)

Another elder shared,

I always thought he was *more talented* than our church. He could sing well. He could preach extremely well. His relationships with kids is tremendous. His interpersonal skills with all people involved...he always knew how to say the right thing, do the right thing, and he is just a very motivating person. No one disliked Jim. (JO/t/10-31/5)

The researcher observed his quality singing voice—both solo and harmony, his ability to play the guitar and trumpet, and effective public speaking ability in just the first worship service he attended (WO/fn/9-26/4).

Jim, however, did not possess the necessary educational credentials to become ordained to the full Gospel ministry in the denomination to which New Life belonged, so he enrolled in seminary classes 2 hours away the first semester after he became New Life’s leader. Jim attended seminary part-time and completed his seminary studies 10 years later. Because he attended a seminary of a different denomination than New Life,

he was forced to complete two additional courses through the Cumberland Presbyterian seminary. When finished with those courses, Jim was ordained in 2009, then officially able to serve as “pastor” of the congregation after leading it for 13 years.

The Pre-Turnaround Experience

This section will describe the formation of New Life Church; its initial, rapid growth; and the devastating split that occurred before the congregation was even two decades old. The researcher will then provide details of the next 20 years of ministry that was marked by plateau and decline, including a second split that occurred just prior to Jim’s arrival in 1996. Information gleaned about the leadership behaviors of the two previous pastors will be included as a means to understanding the specific, contrasting behaviors that Jim utilized to promote turnaround and to aid in understanding the setting into which he entered as pastor.

The Formative Years and Initial Split

Members of the congregation during its formative years provided much of the information for this section. Currently, only two of the original members of the congregation are alive and were able to share with the researcher, a couple who were in college at that time and who are still very active in the ministry of the congregation. Both sing in the choir, and one served the congregation as an elder prior to becoming an ordained minister, served other churches, and returned to the church as a part-time ministry assistant in 2008. The widow of a charter member and member of the congregation for 49 years, who still teaches Sunday School, participated in the interviews. Additionally, a couple who joined the congregation a few years after the congregation was organized, and four others who joined the congregation within its first

10 years of life, provided information for this section of the study. Two of those long-time members have served the congregation as elders.

Those members interviewed described the founding pastor, Paul, in positive terms, and several credited a connection to the pastor as the reason they became members. Frank shared, “He was a lot like Jim. He did it all. He was gifted in music, could sing, was a good preacher” (FR/fn/11-20). Like Jim, he was a community leader; and, like Jim and Amy, he and wife were a talented couple that worked together to lead the church. However, he was independent-minded, and the church was gradually becoming “Paul’s church” as he grew very distant from the presbytery in which the church was a member. He did not desire to support missionaries or ministries of the denomination but led the congregation to support independent ministries of people with whom he knew in seminary or knew personally (FR/fn/11-20; FR/t/10-4/3). “I know that at that time he didn’t want to contribute toward the missions fund and pay our dues..., and he wanted to pull out of the denomination,” remembered Nedra, whose husband was a charter member (NE/t/10-4/3). Additionally, the pastor began public rebuke of some who did not support his desire to build a new sanctuary for the growing congregation. According to Frank, the church still owed around \$50,000-\$60,000 from its previous building projects. Congregational members were asked to go to the bank and sign individual commitments for funds to build a new sanctuary, and many just felt like they could not do that (FR/fn/11-20).

Tensions came to a head between the pastor and church leadership as the church had stopped paying its apportionments to presbytery. When challenged by presbytery to begin to pay again—and when some elders agreed—the pastor began a movement

towards independence. “He was really wanting to go independent, and there was enough of us, I was stubborn, we wanted to keep it C.P.,” shared Tom, an elder at the time (TC/t/10-3b). Some elders resigned when the majority voted to pay the apportionments (called Our United Outreach, or OUO, in this denomination). Shortly thereafter, some began to circulate a petition—during worship services—to leave the denomination. Frank says he still has a copy of the speech that he gave from the pulpit on behalf of the church one Sunday morning, trying to bring unity to the church. “I felt someone needed to speak for the church, and so I did speak before the whole congregation and tried to bring some unity; but, it was inevitable that that group was going to leave, and he would be their preacher” (FR/t/10-4/3b). With the pastor desiring to pull away, 165 members and 9 of the church’s 15 elders left the congregation and formed another congregation in 1974, leaving only 115 members in the congregation.

One participant described it as a painful time when friends and families were split. Many felt torn by the decision that seemed to be whether to worship God or a man (FR/t/10-4/3d). One of the charter members said that she had lost her parents and endured many difficult trials, but “the worst thing I have ever experienced was the split.” She further described the pain and scars which were so deep that “I think this is the first year that I have ever felt like we were over it...or that I am over it, and I think...it’s okay” (LU/t/9-26/19b). Nedra shared similar painful memories, “I had never known anything like it...it was awful” (NE/t/10-4/3). Frank said, “It was horrible. All of those people were my friends” (FR/fn/11-20).

Period of Plateau and Decline

Those who provided information for the previous section also provided insight into the next 20 years of the congregation's life. Additionally, the researcher gained the participation of four others who joined the congregation shortly after the devastating split. Two of those members have served the congregation as elders. The researcher also interviewed three others who became a part of the congregation prior to 1994, two of which served as elders during the congregation's second split, and another whose parents and brothers' families left the congregation during the second split but who has remained with New Life and served as an elder at various points since 1994.

Even though a couple of interviewees mentioned the positive contribution of the pastor immediately following the split, he only stayed about 18 months. That began a 20-year period following the 1974 split that was marked by high pastoral turnover and little growth, as evidenced by not a single interviewee describing anything of significance that grew the congregation until the early 1990's. Betty, a 45-year member, said, "It seemed like we had a new minister every year and that was very frustrating" (BE/t/10-27/4). "I don't remember any certain emphasis or direction," shared another (VA/t/10-3/4). One of the elders shared, "I don't think we had any goals" (SC/t/10-3/4). One ascribed this turnover to the congregation's reputation as "tough to pastor" in those years following the split (FR/t/10-4/4a). Perhaps the doggedness of the remaining group—that some described as "a core" that just was not going to leave—led them to become suspicious of pastoral leadership after the split. Two shared their feelings that the church softball team was a point of unity and pride within the congregation during the difficult years and served as a resource for outreach to prisons and others in the community (FR/t/10-4/4;

GA/fn/10-5/2). However, Frank evaluated much of the church's ministry of this period, and its turnover of leaders, as somewhat unprepared and unresponsive to changing needs and times. He summarized, "While methods are changing, and we are not changing to present the Gospel and use the different kinds of opportunities to reach another generation...I think we were dragging our feet there...I would say that maintenance ministry was pretty much what we were into" (FR/t/10-4/4a).

Brother Henry's pastorate. Most describe Brother Henry's pastorate as a positive time within the congregation, even though the hiring of a pastor who had been divorced—and the 'fit-ness' for leadership in the church of those who had been divorced or married a divorced person—caused some uneasiness in the conservative congregation at the beginning of the 1990's (NE/t/10-4/6; TC/t/10-3/5; FR/t/10-4/4). Frank's wife, Lunelle described the pastor and his wife Jane as "very loving and not negative people at all" (LU/t/9-26/5). Susan agreed, "He was a good counselor as well as a good preacher. She was an absolute riot. She was so much fun" (SU/t/10-4/3). Nedra said, that Henry "did a great job" (NE/t/10-4/4). Frank described him as a good administrator and a good preacher (FR/t/10-4/4b). Four of those interviewed describe the importance of starting the youth ministry program, LOGOS, during his tenure as a source of significant growth within the congregation. The ministry required the involvement of at least one parent in some aspect of the program as a condition for the child's participation. "If you bring the kids in, then the parents start coming with them. I know several came just to get their kids enrolled in a program," said Cheryl, Tom's wife (TC/t/10-3/3b). Ward became a part of the congregation during this period and shares, "We became involved in the LOGOS program with our children. Our oldest son got invited, and we started coming with them;

and from that, we became members...At that time, in order to come you had to participate... We actually got involved in the kitchen. We washed dishes” (WA/t/10-31-10/3).

The church added several families during this period, as evidenced by a gain of 20 members in 1993 (See Appendix A). Henry and Jane were well-liked in the congregation, and Jane had a large Bible class that she taught on Sunday mornings. Lunelle commented that Jane was “a wonderful Sunday School teacher” who helped build the ministry while Henry was at New Life (LU/t/9-26/5). According to Ward, Jane “was teaching Sunday School class, and we really got involved in Sunday School” (WA/t/10-31/3). Ben and Cindy describe the four years of Henry’s pastorate as a period where “there was a lot of unity” with “lots of fellowship, lots of potluck dinners, ...those types of things” (BC/t/10-27/3).

Despite the strong membership gains in 1993 and gaining some new members most every year, the congregation contained only 140 active members almost 20 years after the split had narrowed their membership to 115 congregants—indicating that many were leaving at the same time others were coming into the congregation. While some expressed a sense of hurt and surprise when Henry and his wife decided to leave in 1994, some revealed what they perceived as a lack of goals and clear direction. Lunelle shared, “Under Henry’s leadership we did a lot of updating the church building...making it a more pleasing place to draw people...prettier...just kind of prettied things up a little bit.” However, she acknowledged when asked to evaluate the culture during the period prior to Jim’s arrival, “The goal was probably just being able to keep our heads above water” (LU/t/9-26/5). Another described this period of the church in terms such as “maintenance

ministry,” “getting the bills paid,” and “not much outreach for the needs of others” (FR/t/10-4/4a).

Church session records for the period of 1992-1994, examined by the researcher while on site, recorded that not a single new program was added and contained nothing about missions or outreach. Monthly meetings’ minutes were dominated by facilities issues, maintenance, finances, and staff concerns. Items of discussion that were present for more than one month between 1992-1994 included pest control, mowing, church cleanliness, facility repair, budget, church secretary, church janitor, count the offering, church camp fees for youth and church membership transfers (SR/fn/1-2). “There was no *drawing*... We had no outreach,” assessed Nedra (NE/t/10-4/4).

Brother Jerry’s pastorate. Less than two months after Henry’s resignation, the church hired Jerry as pastor. The session minutes reveal a noticeable change of focus almost immediately after Jerry’s hire. There were several months of “elder training” that began and multiple mentions of evangelism training for outreach within the congregation (SR/fn/3). The young pastor appeared to be fueling energy for a new direction—perhaps moving too fast according to one respondent (GA/fn/10-5/5). However, problems began to surface very quickly. In less than a year, the pastor began what many respondents referred to as pursuing other priorities that seemed to communicate a lack of heart for ministry within that congregation. The pastor obtained permission to pursue officer training in the army reserve and opened the door for what later became a military career. By winter 1996, Jerry was in basic training, with church salary being paid, and the session was searching for preachers to fill the pulpit during the period of his absence. Gary, a current elder, suggested that his position at the church seemed “more like a job

than a calling” (GA/fn/10-5/5). “He would show up on some nights in his Army fatigues, and that bothered some,” shared Jim (JI/t/9-26/9). Ward assessed that Jerry “might have been more interested in things outside the church” (WA/t/10-31/5).

This was only a small portion of the problems that began to cause what seven respondents referred to as division within the congregation. “There was just division in the fact that some felt like he was a good leader, and some did not. Some followed his preachings. Others were offended at some of his preachings, so there was offense and hurt and pain on one side while there was support on the other and making excuses for just immaturity,” shared Susan (SU/t/10-4/4). Attendance began to drop during Jerry’s tenure—down to as low as 50 in worship—culminating in a 31 active member reduction in 1996. Eight respondents referred to Jerry as “immature” or “inexperienced,” not ready for the pastorate in which he found himself, describing a lack of skills necessary to know how to deal with church leadership and conflict. One evaluated that Jerry “really didn’t know how to be a pastor” (TC/t/10-3/4). “I considered him to be one that was learning. He wasn’t experienced, or maybe he didn’t have the experience in the church and know how to deal with some of the problems that he encountered,” shared another (JA/t/10-3/5). “He was not equipped for this church,” evaluated one who has served as an elder in the church (FR/t/10-4/5). “He just didn’t have what I call an administrative gift,” said one member. “I think there were some important things that just weren’t captured or weren’t kept track of” (VA/t/10-3/5). “He wasn’t experienced or maybe he didn’t have the experience in the church and know how to deal with some of the problems that he encountered...,” said a member of over four decades (JA/t/10-3/5). “He just wasn’t equipped. Like I said, this church is a hard church to pastor,” assessed another (FR/t/10-

4/4c). Another long-time member shared, “Jerry was very young and very immature and he did a lot of talking when he shouldn’t have. Church stuff out of church...He always talked a lot about money...he didn’t get paid enough...they couldn’t make it on his salary. He talked out in the community; things like that” (LU/t/9-26/3,5). One who is now active in the congregation again but left for a period during Jerry’s tenure, said that he “asked for some advice and failed to get it, and we felt if he couldn’t be our minister, we would seek that somewhere else” (WA/t/10-31/6).

As tensions began to rise, several respondents described prayer meetings and secret meetings that forced people to choose sides, rather than working towards common ground, which seemed to be fueled by the pastor and his wife. “I was there for what I thought was a prayer meeting, and Jerry was really put down, he and his wife...it was a put-down-Jerry night,” said Jane, describing the conflicts of that period (JA/t/10-3/4,5). “Somebody told me [a secret meeting] was happening, and I came back and acted like I stumbled on it,” shared Scott, one of the two active elders that did not resign during this turbulent period. “They were crying about how bad [Jerry] was being treated and all the things that people were doing to him” (SC/t/9-26/5). Pastor Jim shared his perception of the torn spirits that many had: “There was a lot of hardness, the ones who felt like they did the right thing or felt like they were not loved” (JI/t/9-26/7). Scott revealed his inner struggles while serving the congregation as a leader, “[Some] didn’t want Jerry to leave, but like I say, we were dying” (SC/t/10-3/4). One of the churches elders had stopped attending, and four others resigned when Jerry was finally asked to resign, which left only two elders at this second low point in the congregation’s past.

A lack of interpersonal, people skills seemed to be at the root of Jerry's problems. "Everyone said he was great in the pulpit, fine in the pulpit, but when it was one-on-one personal relationships, he was totally tactless," shared Jim (JI/t/9-26/9). Many respondents used similar terms to describe his abrasiveness. A current elder who was in his mid-20's during that time, shared his evaluation of Jerry's ministry skills, "The interpersonal skills were lacking...not so much the preaching, but the one-on-one visits and the communications personally, some people thought maybe he was a little rough and abrasive" (JO/t/10-31/3). According to an elder during Jerry's tenure, he "was never able to connect with the people...he didn't gel with the people" (BC/t/10-27/5-6). Another member shared, "Walls just came up where communication just didn't happen" (VA/t/10-3/5). Eight members referred to a lack of tact or inability to communicate in a non-offensive way. "His people skills sorta hurt him some too...just one-on-one, talking to people," assessed one (FR/t/10-4/4c). The current pastor, Jim, recalled what several had shared to be a deeply divisive comment made from the pulpit: "How can you be a Christian and be a Democrat?" (JI/t/9-26/9). Another who served as an elder during Jerry's tenure and described him as argumentative with the session and said, "He would argue about everything, just argumentative about everything. It didn't matter what came up, he would argue about it, whether it be good or bad" (GP/t/10-3/5). Three respondents described a lack of integrity or honesty in some dealing with Jerry as a source of dissatisfaction. "He didn't tell me the truth about a thing and *that* was what turned me off completely," shared one member of over four decades (BE/t/10-27/6).

Equally disturbing to a group of those interviewed was what was perceived to be a very low opinion of women and perhaps poor treatment of his own family. Four

respondents described feelings of empathy for Jerry's wife, and felt that she was not treated as she should have been by her husband. One shared, "He had a real nice wife and little girl, and I could be sitting and talking to his wife about something, and he would walk up, and she would just clam up and wouldn't say a word," (SC/t/10-3/4). Though she returned as secretary shortly after Jim was hired and has remained secretary for almost the entirety of his pastorate, Susan's resignation during Jerry's tenure was perhaps an indication of the tense working environment that existed (SR/fn/4). Ben remembered a particular conflict he had with Jerry, "He asked me one Sunday if I would get up in front of the congregation and make the announcement that no longer would the women be allowed to have any leadership place in the church or teach Sunday School, and I said, 'No way, I am not going to do that. If you want that done, you will have to do that yourself...and when you do, you better have all the men lined up to take all the classes, cause if you look around, probably 90% of the teachers are women'" (BC/t/10-27/6). He, nor any other elder, made that announcement, but it revealed the negative view of women that some perceived Jerry to communicate.

Session minutes shifted back to concerns about facilities and non-ministry tasks during the first months of 1996. Jerry was eventually asked to leave by the members of the session, and he resigned in April, 1996. However, this decision was not unanimously supported by the congregation. John, whose parents, brother, and brother's family left the congregation because of their support for Brother Jerry, decided to stay but acknowledged, "The congregation at that point had to take sides," leaving deep scars within the church (JO/t/10-31/4). Susan described it similarly as people being forced to

“choose sides” and Jerry forming a “group of supporters” (SU/t/10-3/4). The current pastor analyzed:

When you choose a staff member, there’s going to be a sense of loyalty there one way or the other, even if they totally foul up. There’s people who learn to support their pastor, even if what he’s doing is not supported. And the ones who were closest to him knew the truth of it, and the others didn’t, so it just wreaked havoc...There was a lot of hardness, the ones who felt like they did the right thing or felt like they were not loved. (JI/t/9-26/7)

Gary noted that the church itself did not have strong leadership at that time, perhaps making the problems worse (GA/fn/10-5/4). Jim described the situation he entered in the winter of 1996 as a congregation that was “hurting,” “moderately desperate,” and “very precarious.” However, he noted:

I feel like there was a genuine hunger to be better, to be more than what they were. And I think they were scared...I think scared in that we don’t want to ruin the vision that had been entrusted to this church. And it almost happened. (JI/t/9-26/5)

The Turnaround Foundation

After a few months of searching, the leaders of New Life went outside of their denomination to find a leader that helped them create a different future from the tumultuous past that had now included two splits. However, the turnaround at New Life was not immediate. In fact, significant growth in membership did not occur until the 4th year of Jim’s pastorate. This section outlines the preparatory work that interviewees said contributed to laying the foundation for the growth that began in 1999.

Brother Jim's Early Work

Regular worship attendance was around 60 when the session asked Jim to consider becoming the church's pastor in the fall of 1996. Describing the condition of the church that Jim inherited, Cindy, a member of 35 years, said:

We have a core in the church, and we are part of that core. No matter what happened or went on, those people were there every Sunday. They give their money. They did the work on the building...that core of that church is what has kept that church together. (BC/t/10-27/3)

One of the original members made this assessment about that core when Jim arrived: "I think the people at [New Life] were just ready to do whatever it took to get the church to grow...that they were open to new leadership, to new ideas, to new ways of worship" (LU/t/9-26/6b). The 30-year old, new pastor was serving as associate pastor at Cornerstone Church when he accepted the position at New Life Church. Jim was a music major at the University of Kentucky where he met and married his wife, who was well known and well respected in the town in which Cornerstone and New Life were located. They were a talented and energetic couple; yet, Jim possessed no formal seminary training, and this was his first experience as a senior pastor at any congregation. However, he did possess intimate knowledge of church leadership gained by observing his father and grandfather, both of whom had served churches as ministers, and by serving in three different churches over a 9-year period. Those were valuable skills as he began his work in a church the current secretary described as "full of pain" (SU/t/10-4/5b), but also as Jim described as "desperate and ready to rally" (JI/t/9-26/5a). Susan, who had remained a member of the congregation after resigning while Jerry was pastor,

noted that Jim possessed the wisdom to ignore small matters that could cause division. “He did not allow division but worked toward peace, unity, and wholeness of the body of Christ and would not tolerate any disunity; and, he worked toward that from the time he stepped into the pulpit” (SU/t/10-4/5b).

Jim recalled that his first sermon as pastor was from the book of Nehemiah, the story of a “broken people about their condition” and their commitment to rally with Nehemiah to rebuild the Jerusalem walls that stood proudly years before as a signal of Israel’s strength and vibrancy. That theme of “reclaiming” what they believed to be God’s purpose for their congregation was a common theme in the early years of Jim’s pastorate (JI/fn/9-25/2). Jim’s preaching was a source of healing for the congregation, and he described his early teaching from the pulpit as preaching a lot of love, “almost every other Sunday,” trying to establish the “expectation about how we treat one another” (JI/t/9-16/3,10).

Immediately, one can notice the flurry of activity and shift of focus in church session meetings. Shortly after his hire, the pastor and elders set as goals for the 1997 year to make its budget of \$1300 per week but also to restore the LOGOS youth program that had been a source of outreach a few years earlier and to begin to support youth programs financially (SR/fn/7). Four respondents describe Jim’s activity in the initial years of his pastorate as selling a positive vision of what the church could become, with little doubt that youth and children’s programming was a priority on his list. Five respondents described the restoration of LOGOS and the growing ministries to youth and children as major activities that laid the groundwork for turnaround. Session minutes in his first year indicated the addition of Sunday night youth events, children’s church, a

youth trip, youth fundraisers, a nursery ministry, and monthly financial support for the Fellowship of Christian Athletes chapter at the local high school (SR/fn/7).

Little numerical growth occurred in the first three years of Jim's leadership (See Appendix A), but an optimism and energy was evident in church session minutes. Jim and his wife Amy were laying a foundation for future growth that accelerated dramatically in 1999, when the church welcomed 41 new members. This growth was bolstered some from division in Cornerstone Church over the dismissal of its pastor—who now attends New Life—and the return of some members who had left in the 1974 split. However, in those first three years, the congregation slowly gained a positive reputation in the community on the backs of the reputations of this pastor couple. Seven respondents noted that the couple was “well respected” in the town, and the church benefited from that community opinion. Cindy shared:

He married a local girl here...very well known...He met a lot of people out there, out of church, unchurched, and I think that's what brought them in. They were young people his age. Either they had small children or got married and were having small children; and, that's what brought that age group in. (BC/t/10-27/7)

Not only was Amy from a respected family in the community, but many knew Jim from his work with the band at one of the local high schools and his growing community presence, which later led him to become a city councilman. “Bro. Jim...his connections from his previous church and being in the school systems...if I remember right, he may have been teaching a little bit; and, through his respect there, that naturally brought some people to this church,” remembered John (JO/t/10-31/6). Lunelle assessed:

Jim helped with the band at the high school and the middle school...which was a lot of connection for him...for the church. Amy grew up in this community...came from a well-respected family. And, people knew her and connected with her. She taught school at the middle school, and the kids really liked her. She was a really good teacher. (LU/t/9-26/6a)

Three respondents described Jim's exceptional skills in meeting and developing relationships with people, and three others credited his out-going, warm, caring personality as a magnet for people who were searching for a church home in these early years. Speaking of Jim, Nedra said, "He is such a loving person. He is so community minded. And, he is wonderful with children," in response to a question seeking her perspective of events that led to the 1999 surge in membership growth (NE/t/10-4/8).

The Building Blocks for Turnaround

While significant numerical membership growth did not begin until 1999, the respondents and corroborating evidence obtained through examining session meeting minutes revealed three central priorities of the previous three years that laid the foundation for that growth in Jim's fourth year as pastor. Those priorities were providing quality worship services, emphasizing youth and education programs, and improving facilities.

Quality worship services. Five respondents credited new music and worship as factors that contributed to the surge of growth in 1999, while six respondents mentioned the implementation of quality worship and music as a behavior of the pastor in promoting turnaround. Scott assessed, "I think our music ministry helped a lot...He had a tremendous voice singing, him and Amy both" (SC/t/9-26/8). "I remember a lot of talk

about the music. Jim and Amy were both very talented as far as music and leading that. And that was the time when more of the praise and worship choruses and things were coming. The people were very open to that...very accepting I think, in the church. And, I think that drew a lot of young people,” recalled Lunelle (LU/t/9-26/6a). Most described the worship as a blend of contemporary songs mixed with hymns, as well as a constant variety of other elements that connect with many different people. Frank described the worship as well planned, with a good variety of styles that began to “reach a different generation” that the church had not effectively reached prior to Jim’s arrival (FR/t/10-4/6). Even some who do not particularly embrace the contemporary music acknowledged its contribution, “I don’t care for contemporary music in the service...but if it reaches a younger generation, okay” (NE/t/10-4/8). Jim was intricately involved in every detail of worship, committing to create an experience that provided members an opportunity to proudly invite their friends to participate with them.

Youth and education programs. Second, three respondents credited the growing commitment of the church to education ministries in those early years as a crucial foundation for future growth. “Part of the growth really came as a result of reinstating the LOGOS program...We started to do a really good VBS [Vacation Bible School]....And so just a real ministry to family” (JI/t/9-26/10). “We built our youth program. We really got out and worked with the youth and brought people in that way,” recalled Scott (SC/t/9-26/9). In addition to the mid-week LOGOS program geared toward the education of their youth, session records revealed the initiation of a men’s bible study and a “Through the Bible” class in Jim’s first year. Shortly thereafter, other 6- to 12-week classes were offered, including a 12-week marriage seminar in 1998 that signaled the

expansion of ministries for families (SR/fn/7-9). Elder Gary mentioned the importance of this education foundation that was formed in these early years of Jim's pastorate, especially to the youth, by noting in retrospect that, "My child knew more about the Bible than I did. By the time my daughter was in high school, she had been through every book of the Bible" (GA/fn/10-5/7).

Facility improvements. Though no member mentioned it, Jim discussed the importance of improving the appearance of the church facility in the first three years of his ministry. In trying to make the church more inviting to prospective members, Jim led the session to address issues with the parking lot, fellowship hall upgrades, windows, carpet, grounds appearance, and a new church sign within his first two years. Sunday School classes and groups were asked to adopt-a-room throughout the church, the sanctuary was painted, a fund was established to renovate the basement of the church, and a new piano was purchased (SR/fn/7-9). "We did everything from painting to remodeling to improving the sound system, tweaking how we did worship, working on how people were greeted, updating our bulletins...making them look better," Jim shared. "When [Jerry] was here, he wanted to get...he'd go out into the community, invite everybody to church, and try to get them saved. But, they didn't create a church environment that people wanted to come to" (JI/t/-26/37). It was at that point Jim believed that, "This started to be a place where I think people were not ashamed to invite their friends" (JI/t/9-26/10).

Fueling and Sustaining Turnaround: The Personality

Perhaps because the turnaround process occurred over a decade prior to this study, respondents had difficulty delineating specific events or behaviors that occurred in

the first years of Jim's leadership that promoted the revitalization of New Life Church. Common ideas emerged through the interviews, though not necessarily under common organizers. The researcher asked interviewees to describe pastoral behaviors that "promoted turnaround" and those that "sustained turnaround." Additionally, they were asked to evaluate the pastor's "strengths," "leadership style," and perceived "priorities." Across those five categories, and when analyzed together with their analysis of his "weaknesses," two attributes of this turnaround's leader personality became evident, and five categories of behaviors emerged as critical players in the New Life turnaround.

While this study seeks to discern intentional leadership behaviors that contribute to turnaround, the data collected suggests that Jim possessed personal character traits that were essential in his ability to lead turnaround. Almost no respondents could begin to answer "what Jim did" without addressing "who he was." The findings presented in the next section suggest that Jim's people skills and his penchant for details were key factors in the turnaround experience at New Life.

A People Person

When asked to describe Jim's leadership style, seven mentioned his caring, compassionate nature, four mentioned his sincerity, four mentioned his ease in conversation with others, and three mentioned his outgoing nature. The work that he was able to foster begins in many of these interviewees with his personality and his ability to connect with people. "He has a great personality...very outgoing," shared Betty (BE/t/10-27/8,11). "He just has a good, outgoing personality. Everybody likes him. A good sense of humor...just an all-around good fella," assessed George (GP/t/10-3/11). "He has a very charismatic personality. People are drawn to him. They love him. He is easy. He is

friendly,” said Susan (SU/t/10-4/5a). “He has a good initial meeting with people. He is warm and welcoming,” offered David, a new member who came to New Life after spending nearly 40 years as the pastor of independent Baptist congregations, the last 31 years in the same church in a neighboring county (DA/t/10-27/4). “He is able to relate to each individual,” assessed Ira, who joined the congregation in 2004 (IR/t/10-31/4). Ben used similar words: “He has the ability to relate to people...and made people feel welcome...He’s definitely a people person” (BC/t/10-27/7). “I think his personality is a strength—as far as easy to meet new people...He would be as comfortable with the President as he would anyone,” agreed Lunelle (LU/t/9-26/12). Scott asserted that “People are drawn to him,” and “He is easy to talk to,” according to Richard. When asked to assess his pastor’s strengths, John said, “I think if I had to pin it to one thing, it would be to communicate in a non-threatening way to any person...I think he has the ability of five minutes of speaking to him—as I said, young, old, educated, uneducated—you could say, *Hey, this guy, he cares about me*” (JO/t/10-31/10).

As John’s quote revealed, there is more to his personality than a friendliness and good first impression. New Life members who were interviewed believed that he communicates a genuine care and compassion for the people of the congregation and community, as well as the sense that he is what appears to be. Five respondents used the words “genuine” or “sincere” in describing Jim’s strengths, and seven described him as compassionate and caring in his leadership style. “With Tim, what you see is what you get. He is very genuine and very sincere,” shared Sherry, who along with her husband, Perry, moved to the area in 2003 and became involved in New Life in 2007 (PS/t/10-4/12). “I guess his strengths are love for people and the Lord and wanting them to know

that,” assessed Ben (BC/t/10-27/12). Nedra asserted, “I don’t think he has an ego. I think he is truly, truly sincere. I think he could talk to any age group. He’s been wonderful for the young couples to be able to relate to...in situations they go through...the rearing of children and whatever” (NE/t/10-4/10). Gary agreed that Jim had a gift for reaching out to people with love. “[People] want to be around him and do what he is doing...I like hanging out with Jim. He is always positive...It is easy to see that he is for real” (GA/fn/8,12). Comparing his various experiences in church work and leadership, Richard shared, “He is the most caring pastor that I have ever been associated with” (RI/t/9-26/4). A recent addition to the congregation, Carol, added “He always has time to speak” (JC/t/10-31/4). “He is a very good listener,” offered Mary, who just became involved in New Life seven months prior to this study (MA/t/10-27/7). “I would have to say the one I notice when I am not trying to notice is his empathy. His empathy for people is genuine. Something that people, even though they might not...can’t put their finger on it...it touches people in a way that they can tell is genuine. He is not putting on airs. It is really him,” shared Chad, a 12-year member—and now elder—of the congregation (CH/t/10-27/9).

When asked about specific behaviors on his part that contributed most to turnaround, Jim’s first response reflected an agreement between his desire and his congregation’s assessment, “I try to love people” (JI/t/9-26/11). When asked to assess his personal strengths, his first response was, “I love people” (JI/t/9-26/17). When he was asked to describe his leadership style, his reply included, “I think I do genuinely love people. So I can look at them sincerely, trusting that I know that I’m trying to do what’s

best for them and the church...I try to put them before me. Love them, know their names, try to know what's going on in their lives. I especially try to love the kids" (JI/t/9-26/16).

A portion of Jim's message in the church directory printed in 1997 indicated his priority from the outset of promoting a feeling of belonging:

Realizing the importance of our relationships with one another, we have put together this pictorial directory. I challenge you to get to know everyone in this directory personally. As people join us, write down their names on the pages provided, then work to make them feel a part of our church family. (DI/do/97/1)

And, in 2000, his message carried a similar charge:

This is not just a church directory, but a family picture album. Each page is full of brothers and sisters in Christ. In the Family of God, there are no distant cousins. Therefore, it my hope that as we continue to grow as a body of believers, we also continue to grow as a family.

Use this directory to get to know each other's name and face. Use the addresses to drop each other notes of encouragement. Use the phone numbers to check on each other and to communicate good news.

As others come into the family, add their names and addresses in the spaces provided. Remember, there should be no strangers in the family of God. I hope this family portrait helps us grow closer to God as we draw closer to each other. (DI/do/00/1)

That welcoming, caring personality became a virtue that the congregation has embraced as a priority and the respondents acknowledged it as a factor in its continued growth. No single factor or answer to any question garnered more agreement from the

interviewees than the notion that New Life Church was an open, loving, friendly church that both reached out to newcomers and ministered to the needs of those within their fellowship. When asked to assess the congregation's strengths, thirteen respondents mentioned the loving, caring, fellowship aspects of the congregation, seven mentioned the need-meeting virtue of the members, six mentioned the welcoming nature of the body, and three described the congregation as compassionate.

Sharing from his experience in visiting churches before choosing New Life, David shared:

Reflecting on the 12 other churches that we visited, the openness seems to be a great strength...their welcoming. Most of the other churches, the back door creaked, heads turned...you know what I am saying. Pastors were suspicious...not know who I was or anything else, it seemed. I don't think that was just my idea. So, I think the strength is the *openness* to the church the people have...For the newcomers, they are spoken to, their names are learned and then spoken to again. There is a liberty in the congregation in the Spirit that brings a class likeness to 'Yes, come, be a part of us' rather than a suspicious attitude.

(DA/t/10-27/14)

In describing the congregational priorities, he further offered, "They are warm and welcoming. They want people to come to church. They are not so concerned with 'me and mine.' They reach out to others" (DA/t/10-27/9).

James and Carol, who became a part of the congregation in 2008 after moving to the area when he took a job at the national park nearby, visited the first time after meeting Jim at one of the Sunday night contemporary services geared toward youth that the pastor

was organizing at the local theater. He invited them to come, and “we found it was very spiritual...and the people were very loving. Telling the story of their first visit in tandem, Carol started:

I remember Jim greeted us afterward and welcomed us personally...cause normally he doesn't come down. They continue singing after the 8:30 service, and I remember he welcomed us personally. (James) We had just met him the Sunday before. (Carol) And we were directed right down to Sunday School, that we would fit into a group of people right away. (James) Yeah, I forgot about that. We were almost covered up with people on where we should go. (Carol) Not out the front door...(James) Here's coffee. Here's donuts. Here's... We think you could enjoy this Sunday School...(Carol) It was a very welcoming church. (James) They've been very, very friendly. (JC/t/10-31/3)

When asked to assess the factors that contributed to the growth in 1999, one year after he joined the congregation, Chad said, “I would just like to hope, of course this is just my opinion, that it's just the reputation of the church...that it is a church that would welcome people with open arms no matter who you were or where you were from” CH/t/10-27/4). “When new people come, I see people going up and shaking hands and welcoming them,” Lunelle gladly shared (LU/t/9-26/19a). Only four years removed from joining the congregation himself, Perry assessed, “Most people coming in would feel that the people are accepting of them. They are welcoming...The people are friendly and open” (PS/t/10-4/12). Ira, who became a part of the congregation after supervising the construction clean-up from the new sanctuary and fellowship addition in 2004, described the factors that contributed to his decision to join the congregation, “My wife and

kids...immediately after we came here, they felt like they were welcomed and there were people for them to talk to if they need to talk to anybody” (IR/t/10-31/2).

That feeling of belonging continues after people become a part of the congregation. Almost to a person, every long-term member interviewed used “loving,” “caring,” or “compassionate” in their description of congregational strengths. Analyzing Jim’s influence in the propagation of the character, Lunelle said:

[Jim] got the congregation to thinking more outwardly than inwardly...It was more about others. Maybe not others out in the community, but made them more aware of helping each other. If somebody was sick, take a dish, give them a call, or write a note. He’s real big on things like that. And, new people...connect, you know, with new people. (LU/t/9-26/6d)

Ward believed that the congregation had embraced that direction: “We are really a caring congregation; and, when there is a member that is in need, our congregation is there” (WA/t/10-31/20). Susan agreed, “The strengths of the congregation is their commitment to the church and to one another. If something happens to one person in the church, each and every one will turn to that person and try to help out in some way” (SU/t/10-4/16).

“We have got one of the most loving congregations that could ever be. Opal just had surgery. She fell and broke her shoulder and knee in June or July and we had so much food...we have still got food in the freezer people brought in. They have just really been great to come and minister to us. And it’s that way for anybody, anytime anybody gets a problem,” shared George (GP/t/10-3/17). Valerie shared a similar assessment, “It is a loving group of people” (VA/t/10-3/17). “One of our goals is to be friendly with guests and concerns of the whole congregation...when someone needs help we should...our

Sunday School class will take up money and give to them. So I think the concerns are the people in need,” offered Betty (BE/t/10-27/17). Nedra assessed the congregational strengths in this way: “I think the compassion for the needs of our church families... We have several new members talk about how friendly...the friendliness” (NE/t/10-4/20). While discussing the reputation of the church within its town, Lunelle suggested, “People associate us with people who love the Lord, and we love our neighbors” (LU/t/9-26/16).

According to Jim:

This congregation is very compassionate, very humble in their walk with the Lord. There are a lot of people who are of various professions who come here for revival, but at the same time they really love the Lord. And, grace is a big deal here. (JI/t/9-26/21)

When he described their strengths, he said, “They’re non-judgmental. They really understand grace. They are compassionate. They’ve got servant hearts. These aren’t a bunch of people who are used to being served. Not a lot of white collar folks in our congregation” (JI/t/9-26/31). And, in describing the culture, he shared:

I’d say there’s a genuine care for each other...I think in this region, people can be very friendly, but they’re not real connectional. Because those relationships are somewhat established, because they’ve got friends and family that they’ve grown up with...People are friendly, but they’re not quickly friends. I think that’s a problem throughout this region, and so we’ve been trying to be purposeful about training them to make those connections. (JI/t/9-26/29)

Members who chose this congregation in recent years—rather than being reared in the congregation—share the same assessment of the value of the relationships at New Life. According to Chad:

There are little kids running everywhere and senior citizens or seasoned citizens here, and what is great about that is you'll see the little kids running up to people who have been coming here for 50 years; and, it's like they've known them all their lives. It is just one big happy family. I think that is one of the reasons that people do come here. And the ones who have been here a long time stay because they see that sense of family that is here. (CH/t/10-27/17)

Describing his family's experience since coming to the church 5 years ago, Richard shared, "The love we feel...when somebody is in pain or in trouble or there are issues in their lives, this church reaches out and surrounds them. People here bind together like an army and help support" (RI/t/9-26/1d). Even in her short time in the congregation Mary noticed, "One strength is taking care of the people of the congregation...if they are having a tough time and things like and that...The women's study groups, we've all gotten really good at praying in a group" (MA/t/10-27/14). Five others mentioned the prayer emphasis of the congregation as a means through which that caring is communicated. "It is a praying church. They are very caring," shared James. "And they don't even have to be intentional about it," continued Carol, "they just do it...I mean it's not a burden or anything. I mean they get...people just...step up and do it. It's just wonderful...We were welcomed with open arms from day one" (JC/t/10-31/9).

A Detail Person

A second personal attribute of Jim's that appears to have contributed to the turnaround at New Life is his commitment to do all things with high levels of quality that has motivated him to be involved in many details of ministry within the congregation. Throughout Jim's pastorate at New Life, he has been the only full-time staff member. The church has employed a part-time music minister throughout the entire 14 years that Jim has worked at the church, one for almost 9 years and now Richard for the last 5 years. Susan came back as part-time secretary in 1997 and has remained since, handling the financial, day-to-day management of the church. In 2008, Frank was hired as a part-time ministry assistant, primarily charged to help with visitation of the elderly and incorporation of visitors and new members. The congregation hired Gene only two months prior to this study to work with youth and children's ministries within the church—positions that had been previously filled by volunteers with much help from Jim and Amy. With limited staff help, and because Jim had a specific vision for what he desired many of the ministries of the congregation to look like—especially the youth, children's, and worship ministries—and because he possessed the talents to make those ministries become as he desired, he has been intricately involved throughout his pastorate in the details of many ministries within the church.

His responses revealed an intentional focus on first impressions and on doing things well where "people were not ashamed to invite their friends" (JI/t/9-26/10). Jim displayed his conviction about the importance of setting high expectations when asked about his behaviors that promoted turnaround in the congregation:

We want to make things very purposeful about trying to do things where people are invited in. We did some fantastic cantatas, for instance, where we'd get an orchestra. We didn't have enough singers, so combined with another church. I could direct the orchestra. We did it at a place that was fantastic, and we packed the house. And it was excellent. And so people felt good about that being their church. So I think just trying to model a sense of excellence that people were not ashamed to bring other people in. (JI/t/9-26/11)

However, as the church has grown, qualified staff have become available—albeit still part-time—and the congregation has gained many talented individuals. The responses of many interviewees, when asked to discuss the areas in which their pastor could still grow, may reinforce this notion about the personality of this turnaround leader. Only three answers garnered more than two responses. Four interviewees suggested that his sermons were too long, or that he tried to put too much into a sermon. Six respondents suggested that visitation, especially of the elderly, was an area in which Jim could grow. That response was not given by any interviewee who had joined since 2004, perhaps indicating a different expectation from those who are established in the church or a struggle that some long-time members have in embracing the dynamics of a larger church, specifically the difficulties of a pastor to meet the needs of over 300 members. However, that five respondents indicated a need to delegate, four indicated a need to relinquish control or turn loose of details, and two others suggested that he takes on too much might suggest a connection between his desire for excellence and his personality bent to be intricately involved in details.

Richard shared:

He needs to learn to turn loose of some things. He holds on to some things too close...I say, 'Jim, let this go. Don't micromanage this thing. That's what I am here for...that's what this person's here for.'...He is in the details. He wants to be in the details... Things are evolving to the point that we are able to allow him to step back and not be out there all the time, because it's got to wear him out.

(RI/t/9-26/6)

And, in assessing staff roles in the sustaining turnaround, Richard reiterated that their primary role was to lighten Jim's load understanding that, "We all see that he is a detail person, and he is in the details" (RI/t/9-26/9).

Others agree with Richard. James, with whom Jim spends focused time for accountability and study, said that Jim needed growth in "learning to say 'no' to other people," in order that he could focus more in the areas of leadership and family that are priorities for the turnaround pastor (JC/t/10-31/8). "Sometimes I think he takes on too much," evaluated Lunelle. "Sometimes other people who make decisions, he overrides them. I've heard some talk about the music...he has to put his final approval on the music. And I think sometimes he might do too much of that" (LU/t/9-26/13). While complimenting his musical and theatrical gifts, Sherry still suggested, "Sometimes I have a little feeling like he carries too much of the programming, because he is part of everything: music and everything else" (PS/t/10-4/4c). Gary shared his affirmation that he felt a complete freedom to "agree to disagree" with Jim, acknowledging that there were times when Jim had a vision of how things should be, but had trouble relinquishing control of the event because of the lack of staff. Describing a particular event, he suggested "It was tough for [Jim] to let it not be perfect" (GA/fn/10-5/9).

David, a former pastor, suggested:

I think he needs to be a little more able to hand over areas of ministry because he tries to do everything; and he needs to be able to surrender authority of leadership or areas of ministry to others that he has the Lord's okay on, and the leaders okay in the Spirit on, and let them have it and not take so much onto himself. As the church gets larger, it is impossible for him to do. (DA/t/10-27/8)

Cindy evaluated, "Tim cannot let go and not do everything. When he has the elders there, he should let them do it." Her husband, Ben, then finished, "Part of that is he thinks, if you want something done, do it yourself. And part of that is to show someone how you want it done. He needs to delegate more" (BC/t/10-27/13). That is not an assessment with which Jim disagreed: "I need to turn things over to other people a little bit more, just by virtue of the fact that I don't have the energy I used to have," (JI/t/9-26/20) revealing the character trait that was crucial in the turnaround but may be evolving in sustaining the growth in future years. "I'm going to do more of trying to strategically place people and let them do more, so I can do less, as far as the hands-on," he shared in answer to his vision for his role in the next 5 to 10 years (JI/t/9-26/33).

Fueling and Sustaining Turnaround: The Behaviors

As will be delineated in the remainder of this chapter, interviewees and corroborating evidence suggested there were specific, intentional behaviors that Jim practiced that have contributed most significantly to turnaround at New Life. While each section but one will contain descriptions of various manifestations of these behaviors, this section will describe Jim's commitments to develop a community presence; provide

quality, meaningful worship; educate and equip the members; provide a vision for the future; and empower and mobilize the laity.

Develop a Community Presence

While mentioned earlier in this chapter as a foundation for turnaround, the frequency with which the reputation of the pastor couple and Jim's involvement in the community was mentioned by interviewees as a factor in the church's turnaround highlights its importance as a behavior contributing to turnaround in New Life Church. "He worked with the band at the high school, and of course our young people who involved in the band, ... There was a camaraderie between them and the band parents," offered Paula in assessing the behaviors that sparked turnaround (GP/t/10-3/7). "I'd already established myself fairly well in the community, I think, ... shown to be fairly steady. I had been moderately successful at [Cornerstone] Church. I helped that church to grow" shared Jim in accessing his initial assets. "My wife is from this community. They knew her, certainly, for a long time" (JI/t/9-26/4).

However, a community reputation was more than just an initial asset—it remained a regular part of Jim's ministry and presence within the community through the past 14 years. Speaking of working with the band, Jim shared:

You get to know everybody. You're in the community, out with the kids. So, that was one big thing. Being on the city council, that's been something where, you know, it says 'That person is a professional.' This person, whether they agree with me or not, at least I'm doing something. And I think those things have helped. They had to help. Because a lot of times the people knew the church because they knew me first. (JI/t/9-26/19)

Though he has not worked with the school band for several years, he currently teaches four hours a week at the private Christian school in town and continues to serve on the city council. In evaluating the behaviors that contribute to sustaining growth, Chad shared that he “has a sterling reputation in the community, which probably has a lot to do with it. People meet him, get to know him, and it encourages them to come along” (CH/t/10-27/6). “I think because Jim is a community servant type, he meets people, or they get to know him in a different setting; and, he doesn’t appear *holier-than-thou*... ‘I am the preacher.’ He just blends in well,” shared Nedra (NE/t/10-4/21). “He lets himself be known in the community, and I think that is good,” offered Betty in assessing Jim’s priorities (BE/t/10-27/15).

Gary said that one of Jim’s behaviors that promoted turnaround was his ability to exhibit personal character in dealing with people in the community, to show Christ in his life. “That’s what Jim does.” Whether it is on the city council, the plaza committee, or whatever... “it is done through Christ, and it shows” (GA/fn/10-5/8). According to John, Jim “just has a burden for the community. He feels we have moral decay in the culture. And I think this is an overriding burden... we need to step up as Christians and try to stop the downward spiral” (JO/t/10-31/13).

Chad and Lunelle described that burden as a desire within the church to “shine in the community” (CH/t/10-27/13; LU/t/9-26/14), and Susan called the priority “being a light unto the world” (SU/t/10-4/12). Nedra described that influence outside of the church as well:

He even works with the little league. He has a son that plays in the little league, and I see those kids just go to him, you know. And whatever he says... you can

just see that they trust him. He is so kind with them. My grandson plays. In fact his son and my grandson were on the same team this past summer, so I was able to observe in this area. And, also they make contacts. They reach out at the ballpark. We probably have six people since this summer because he related to their child, and they liked that. (NE/t/10-4/14)

Speaking of the pastor they have only known for two years, Carol commended:

He is committed to the church, but he is committed to [the city]...to the community and how he wants us to be. You know, he's not just here to 'church', he is on the move. He is over at the Christian school. He is trying to make everything right. (JC/t/10-31/7)

And James finished, "He is trying to develop a community...not necessarily a community of faith here, but a community you can live in that is solid—a family-oriented community" (JC/t/10-31/7).

Provide Quality, Meaningful Worship

A second idea that was briefly mentioned earlier in this chapter as a foundational element of turnaround must be addressed in its value to promoting and sustaining turnaround at New Life. When asked to assess the congregational priorities, Jim listed providing "quality, meaningful worship" as second in his assessment (JI/t/9-26/21). Frank agreed:

Worship that connects with the church, beginning to reach a different generation with guitars and band, and just a different style of worship—skills and worship style—was introduced, and it started connecting with the younger generation...young couples...high school age. (FR/t/10-4/6)

Blending contemporary music and media. The shift in how worship services were conducted began discreetly, but immediately upon Jim's arrival. In his first session meeting, the December 1996 minutes indicate an intention to expand to songs beyond the hymnbooks with the approval of the purchase of a copyright license for music (SR/fn/6). In February of 1997, the session discussed a new sound system and began discussions about a new piano, a fundraising goal was set for that piano in August, and the piano was purchased in March, 1998 (SR/fn/7-9). In August of that year, the church purchased an overhead projector to be used in the sanctuary (SR/fn/10). In February, 1999 the church began to devote a specific time slot to the newer, contemporary music and praise services when they began Sunday night praise and singing services (SR/fn/11). Jim noted the importance of the worship experience shift when he attempted to discern the contributors to the significant growth that began in 1999: "We were kind of really hitting our stride with the way our worship services were carried out" (JI/t/9-26/10).

That the worship service was serving as a significant point of entry for the congregation was evident by the discussion recorded in session minutes a month later regarding the need to schedule social events to integrate the new people that were attending those services. That transformation continued with the purchase of an electronic keyboard in June, 1999, and then with the request from the youth to use additional instruments during worship on a Youth Sunday event (SR/fn/11,13). As construction on the new sanctuary was beginning, the session voted to allow Jim to purchase a set of drums for the sanctuary (February, 2003). That summer, discussion began about the use of different forms of media, especially in the new sanctuary, and the purchase of a laptop to be used towards that end (SR/fn/19-20). The music director changed in the summer of

2005, when Richard—who came from a Pentecostal background and had been attending services at New Life—began volunteering with the music. That June not only marked another significant change, but perhaps a final shift away from what the worship had been when the session voted to sell the organ and purchase a new keyboard for the sanctuary (SR/fn/21). When looked at in retrospect, that change at New Life was significant. Not speaking entirely about worship, but assessing the importance of that change, Ward suggested, “We’ve changed a lot...you’ve got to change things. You’ve got to stay fresh. You’ve got to have new ideas” (WA/t/10-31/10). The worship style shift was certainly necessary in Jim’s view, but the gradual shift over a 9-year period indicated that it was a change the congregation accepted gradually at a pace that would not cause deep division.

Jim and Amy were capable leaders of such a change, as evidenced by the responses of those interviewed. Lunelle, who has been with the church in some capacity since its inception—except for the 9-year period that she and Frank moved away to pastor churches outside their immediate area—credited Jim and Amy’s leadership in praise and worship music and the incorporation of drama and other elements as a key factor in promoting turnaround. She, along with Betty who has been at New Life 45 years, mentioned the multi-media visual aides that are often a part of Jim’s messages as a helpful change. When asked about Jim’s strengths, Lunelle mentioned his skills as a preacher first, followed by her pastor’s skills as a worship leader (LU/t/9-26/12). Betty agreed but flipped the order, “I would say his greatest strengths is his musical abilities, and his, probably his sermons would be second” (BE/t/10-27/12). The first response from Scott, when asked what pastoral behavior promoted the initial growth, was “The music

ministry...the singing and playing, by Jim and Amy, really drew people in. When you take music, you can get through about anything you want to with music, and it's just a blend. [Jim] really does well with that," shared Ben (BC/t/10-27/12).

That change, however, is a process that is on-going and continues to be a source of some dissatisfaction within the congregation. Speaking of the music in worship, Frank acknowledged that the church was still dealing with it (FR/t/10-4/6). As was already stated, many of the longer-term members acknowledge the benefit of the contemporary, but also expressed a preference that more hymns remain a part of the worship experience. Glen shared:

The main complaint that I hear, and it is improving rapidly, is that the music got pretty loud...and drums and guitars. And, we noticed a big difference in that just in the last Sunday or two. I don't know if God worked on it and got some of the people out of the church whose guitars were the loudest, but they are not there any more. A new church came to town that they went to, I think. (GP/t/10-3/13)

"Some really don't like the music they play...don't like the praise and worship music all the time...want to go back to the basics and the old fashioned hymns," shared Cindy. "It is really hard to blend the two successfully. It can be done, but it's very hard to blend the two together," finished her husband Ben (BC/t/10-27/10). "I think the music has been a problem," shared Nedra, even though she sees its value with younger people (NE/t/10-4/17). Susan acknowledged the difficult balance, "The contemporary music draws young people," but also believed that a congregational priority is to "find a more traditional balance with the contemporary" (SU/t/10-5/14). Even newer members, Perry and Sherry, who spent the majority of their lives in college communities, acknowledge their own

struggles. “We would prefer more hymns,” shared Sherry. And her husband finished, “That is my taste preference, but my preference is to meet the needs of the larger church body and to attract people...How many times does it say in the Scriptures, ‘Sing a new song’?...I think you’ve got to have contemporary music in order to build a church” (PS/t/10-4/9).

Offering variety in worship. Most seemed to believe that the variety was, on the whole, a great asset. Noting the importance of the worship experience in the early years of Jim’s pastorate, Paula offered, “He has real good sermons but you never knew from Sunday to Sunday what was going to be, like the order of worship. You just didn’t know. But it was all good.” And, George finished, “He would blow his trumpet and everybody enjoyed that. He used that trumpet for offertory music sometimes and everybody liked it” (GP/t/10-3/6). “The service can change...” noted David, “the service can come in to do a regular service, but if testimonies take over it doesn’t alarm [Jim]” (DA/t/10-27/7). Ira shared:

[Jim] is going to keep it entertaining and keep you enticed to see what is going to happen next. Like the children’s services...they are always mixing it up. Every time it is here, you know, it is always going to be different and something to keep the kids entertained and learning at the same time. (IR/t/10-31/3)

Frank—who served as pastor of several small, country churches between 1982-1996, then as a full-time minister in larger churches through 2005, before returning to a small church from 2006 to his resignation that was effective the last Sunday the researcher was on-site—noted that Jim makes a conscious effort to try to blend styles and recognize requests, noting the importance of the variety.

He recognizes those requests and tries to put in worship, interjecting in worship some of the things that will connect with all people, the older generation, too. He will put in the Lord's Prayer or the Apostles Creed...not an every Sunday kind of thing...It's a variety. (FR/t/10-4/6)

That variety, according to John, has been an important piece of the turnaround puzzle.

I think he has always done a great job of bringing a great variety to the church service. New people coming in, new speakers he would actively seek out, and musical groups coming in. He just...I think people never *got comfortable*...something new and exciting each year that would be done to keep things fresh. (JO/t/10-31/7)

Connecting in worship. Jim had much to say about the worship services at New Life during his 'formal' interview with the researcher:

It's not about the music...it is about whether or not we are connecting. So, everything should be *Is this communicating?* And so, worship is about revelation and response. God is the One who does the revealing and us who do the response. So it is our job, those who are planning and leading worship, to help reveal what is in the Scriptures...help to reveal what's God character...what God's will is. So we need to use every method possible to communicate that freely...we did not plan worship saying, *This is a contemporary song. This is a hymn.* So, I think you need to think of it, not in terms of style, but as in terms of revelation and response. Now, the other thing is, you've got to give people a voice to respond. It has to be something they understand. And you have to remember, you have to give everybody that opportunity. So, some people are not going to respond to Hillsong.

That is just not going to be them. So there had better be a way for them to hear it in their language and respond in their language, some of them. And then you've to establish with everybody that this is the table, and your favorite is not going to be served every Sunday. But you need to eat what's on the table, be thankful that you have it. And you also need to be thankful that somebody else got what their favorite was, knowing that they need to rejoice when you get yours. And, so we try to plan the service accordingly, knowing that sometimes when we spread the table, where the people who like Southern Gospel or whatever, that it speaks to them in a certain way. We are cognizant of that. (JI/t/9-26/39)

Perhaps feeling some of the tension that still existed and a need to reiterate his philosophy, Jim included a teaching moment into the worship services on the Sunday following the interview called *A Word on Worship* and discussed some of the very concepts discussed above. He utilized the metaphor of the table and one's favorite dish, and shared his hope that his congregation would grow in their appreciation of the many varied aspects of worship provided at New Life (WO/fn/10-3/3).

Making good first impressions. Richard, the music minister, was also a voice to speak to the value of the music portion of worship. However, Richard also spoke from the experience of one who had been drawn to New Life by the difference in music styles. Though raised in church and surrendered to the call to ministry at age 15, Richard and his family were searching for a church in 2005, when "Our oldest son started seeing the daughter of a couple who had gone here for years...He came home and said, 'Dad, you have *got* to go visit this church!'" When Richard acted disinterested, his son insisted, "Dad, the music is just unbelievable! The pastor plays the guitar and plays the trumpet,"

and he said, ... (he was like seventeen at the time), 'I know what your taste in church and music and everything is and I'm telling you, you need to go visit.' Well, we came the following Sunday, and we've been coming ever since" (RI/t/9-26/1a). Richard's experience helped convince him of the importance of the quality of the worship service, as that is the first experience many people have with the church. "You don't get a second chance at a first impression," he shared. "And doing something that is not quite up to par may be the deciding factor of whether somebody comes back or not" (RI/t/9-26/5). That is a philosophy that Jim shares as well, noting that most likely that first impression was a better experience by 1999 when the significant growth began to occur. For Jim it is important to "do what you do well" (JI/t/9-26/37). Scott agreed that the quality of their worship services has been a key to New Life's continued growth. "People come and they see the joy. The people that are leading the service and the people that are in the service makes them want to come back" (SC/t/9-26/10).

Educate and Equip the Members

Two other factors mentioned as contributors to the beginning of the turnaround at New Life must also be mentioned in more depth here, as they both contribute to the behavior of training and equipping those within the congregation. When asked to evaluate the congregation's priorities at the present time, Jim referred to "ministering to the children," and stated, "That's our biggest one." His second priority, worship, was discussed in the previous section. "Discipleship" was third on his list, asserting "Particularly the women's discipleship is really strong" (JI/t/9-26/21). Interviewees seemed to agree with their pastor's perception. In assessing the factors that led to the initial growth in 1999, six described the importance of youth and children's ministries

and their fruition both in the lives of the young ones themselves and in their abilities to draw families to the church. Three mentioned the LOGOS program specifically, and three referenced the vacation bible schools conducted by the congregation as valuable in that process. In thinking back to specific behaviors by Jim in that process, four mentioned his work with the youth and children, and four mentioned his leadership in educating the members of the congregation in the teachings of the Bible.

Prioritizing youth and children's ministries. Immediately upon Jim's arrival as pastor, the session set as a goal the restoration of the LOGOS program in 1997 (SR/fn/7). That program, begun while Henry was their pastor, continued to bring value to the congregation. Discussing the programs merits, George shared:

One program that was in our church for years that I contribute a lot of growth to, that was before Jim. And, also after Jim came, it was continued...was called LOGOS. A lot of new people came because of that program, a very good program...That is the reason we have round tables today in the fellowship hall. You had a family type meal for the children, and you had two table parents that sat at each table. And, people volunteered to be table parents so you had two parents at each table—a man and a woman and six children—and you taught them manners and to pass food and that was part of the program...have a prayer and discuss what they were doing at school. It was a family atmosphere and that was really a good program I always thought. (GP/t/10-3/10)

Betty agreed that the program was instrumental in the growth in 1999.

I think it was the LOGOS program and getting the children there and the adults working in that program. And, if you get the children there—and they had special

events that the children participated in—then their parents would come. I think that is the main thing that started the growth. (BE/t/10-27/7)

Jim agreed with their assessment of the importance of LOGOS in the early years of his pastorate, “Part of the growth really came as a result of reinstating the LOGOS program. That had gone by the wayside. And, we brought it back about the year before [the growth in 1999], and that brought in a number of families” (JI/t/9-26/10).

Not only was the commitment to youth and children's programming something which Jim embraced, but it was also something that his parishioners believe he possesses gifts to lead, even in the present. “He really connected well with the young people and the kids of the church. Young adults go where their children are reached...where the pastor knows peoples’ names; and, out in the community he was beginning to make a name for himself,” reflected Lunelle (LU/t/9-26/6c). “He has a great knack for relating to the young children and sees the need to develop them along,” shared John (JO/t/13-31/7). Tom agreed, “He is good with the young people. That makes any church grow. If you can get the young people there, a lot of times parents will follow” (TC/t/10-3/7). “He is absolutely fantastic with children. They are just drawn to him. They love him. He has worked very hard in the ministry of youth,” offered Susan (SU/t/10-4/7). Describing her perceptions of turnaround precipitators in 1999, Nedra said:

Although his messages are great, he has such a love for children and young people. And, think because of his personality, he is able to relate to the younger generation...I think that was the beginning. Because it pulled parents with children in. He was out and about...he was active. (NE/t/10-4/8)

In attempting to discern Jim's priorities, Chad suggested, "He obviously has a heart for our youth...not just our youth, but youth in general—our city, our county, our state, our world" (CH/t/10-27/12). Richard agreed:

He loves young people. He loves kids...and he has spoken this from the pulpit: that if we invest in the youth and the kids, and if we can reach out to them and they feel safe here and want to come here, their families are gonna come, too.
(RI/t/9-26/2)

LOGOS was transformed somewhat in 2007 at Jim's initiative, and was replaced by what is now called WOW, short for *Worship On Wednesdays*. The basic components of education, worship, recreation, and a meal are present, but the strict enforcement of the rules of the LOGOS program is not a primary goal. "Jim, basically, this WOW program we have on Wednesday night now is his idea, is basically the same thing but not quite as strict," assessed George, "A lot of people are reached through that Wednesday night program" (GP/t/10-3/10,13). Gary noted a distinct shift in priorities of Wednesday nights under Jim's leadership. He felt the priority now was to make sure that the church provides quality teaching for the children in those settings. He noted that the number of children attending on Wednesday nights has decreased in recent years, but felt that they were focused on teaching more than just feeding kids. "We had to ask ourselves, 'Are we teaching discipline or Jesus Christ?'" (GR/fn/10-5/7).

The Wednesday night program is only a part of the ministry that New Life has offered for youth and children. Ben and Cindy noted many new and expanded programs under Jim's leadership, especially programs with the youth, were instrumental in promoting turnaround (BC/t/10-27/8). Speaking of sustaining the turnaround, Betty

believed, “It goes back to the children, I think, with bible school and the activities for the children...I think it gets the parents involved” (BE/t/10-27/9). Jim noted the importance of vacation bible school in the early years of the turnaround, “We started to do a really great VBS...a very good VBS...always has been” (JI/t/9-26/10). And, his roles in those bible schools have been significant. He has written the literature, written all of the songs, and even dressed up in character and taught in those summer educational opportunities. When asked to what they attributed the large number of professions of faith in the past 14 years, Paula offered “Bible School is one area. And then Brother Jim has started on Sunday nights, the older youth, *The Gathering* it is called...we don’t go because it is just way out of our age group, but some do, and I believe he is reaching some” (GP/t/10-3/13). John noted the hiring of a youth minister in the last two months signals where a primary focus of the church session is at the time of the study, “Our youth is a priority” (JO/t/10-31/12). Susan concurred in that assessment. “I think that a priority of most of our members is to educate our children and lead them to Christ” (SU/t/10-4/12).

Focusing on evangelism. Jim did not see that youth priority changing at New Life.

In assessing the goals of the next 5-to-10 years, he said:

I think there’s more and more of an emphasis on evangelism, expanding the children’s ministry. I think we really realize that’s where our evangelism needs to take place and is the most productive, and it just makes the most sense. Better to be somebody saved in the faith in our Lord and maybe for the rest of their lives doing that. (JI/t/9-26/32)

That mention of evangelism revealed what many believe is the driving conviction behind Jim’s and New Life’s priority of educating and equipping the members of the

congregation. “Salvation of people...the members of this church. He is very passionate about that,” shared James (JC/t/10-31/10). David assessed:

I think he wants to see souls saved. I think that is his first priority...I don't think he wants growth for the sake of growth...I think he wants growth for the sake of souls...people being saved...changed. There is a big difference there. (DA/t/10-27/10)

“I think he has got a real interest in seeing people saved and come to the Lord. I guess that would be his top priority,” believed George (GP/t/10-3/14). Lunelle agreed, “I think his priority is to see people come to a personal relationship with Jesus” (LU/t/9-26/15). Perry shared a similar assessment. “His primary priority is to lead people to Christ, and to do that he has priorities in terms of having programs that will bring people in so they will be exposed” (PS/t/10-4/10). And, according to Frank, that priority is front and center in every event. “Whatever it is, if we are doing Trunk or Treat, he and Amy will do something that delivers the Gospel” (FR/t/10-4/7).

Building discipleship and family ministries. Jim and his church do not only seek a life-change for the children, but rather for entire families. “A lot of people in the area have suffered divorce, especially young families, children. We were trying to reach out to these families and meet their spiritual needs,” asserted John (JO/t/10-31/12). Frank agreed that the congregation has developed priorities of strengthening families, marriages, and relationships (FR/t/10-4/12). Jim referred to it as the congregation priority “to protect and defend our families, trying to just disciple them so they can avoid the pitfalls” (JI/t/9-26/23). Various targeted studies began to show up regularly in the session minutes after the “Through the Bible” class appeared in December, 1997, followed by the

initiation of a 12-week marriage course in July, 1998. (SR/fn/8-9). As four respondents suggested, the goal of learning the Bible was pre-eminent. However, the congregation provided educational opportunities that sought to delineate how the Bible was to be applied practically in the lives of its members. In November, 1999 the session records indicate the initiation of three new studies that are still a part of the congregation's education ministries today: 1) First Place—a guide to healthy choices in eating and lifestyle that provides Bible studies and a support network for losing weight; 2) Financial Peace University—a course on getting out of debt, living on a budget, and saving for the future; and 3) Aleph to Omega—an examination of every book in the Bible in chronological order over the course of a year (SR/fn/12; BR/do/4,11,12).

In July 2004, the church organized what was called Cumberland University and Cumberland Academy. Those names still exist today. The Academy is the name given to what many churches refer to as Sunday School. It occurs at 9:45 AM on Sunday mornings between the two worship services, and for the kids, it utilizes a curriculum that assures that children raised in that church “will study every book of the Bible and every major theme of the faith by the time they reach high school” (BR/do/14). According to the church's brochure that is available on the information table in the entrance to the sanctuary, the “Cumberland Presbyterian University is a collection of 4-13 week courses designed to help you achieve a right relationship with God. Courses are offered in the fall and spring semesters, as well as summer terms. Courses are offered at different times throughout the week, such as Sunday mornings during Sunday School, and Wednesday evenings. Courses cover a broad range of topics pertinent to the Christian life” (BR/do/2). The brochure lists those previously mentioned, as well as a parenting class, a women's

bible study, books of the bible studies, and a scrapbook ministry and study called *Cumberland Croppers*. These courses reflect the churches commitment to “work hard to help people apply the truths of the Bible to particular needs in their lives,” as stated in the welcome message of the brochure (BR/do/1).

That continued commitment to Biblical education plays a vital role in the church today. Seven respondents listed mentioned Bible studies or some form of educational ministry as a strength of the congregation, and eight believed that discipleship and education are a congregational priority. Speaking of those priorities, Nedra shared,

Our youth...Christian Education... We have a tremendous Sunday School program for kids and on Wednesday night. It's really, really something. And, I am so amazed. I had my seven-year-old grandson today, and he mentioned something about Sunday School yesterday. It's like, *Wow! I wish we had something like that when I was growing up. Sunday School was, Okay, here we go.* But, it is just amazing. I mean they really work with Christian education and the curriculum and with [the kids]. (NE/t/10-4/15)

And sharing about the interactions with the adult members of the Sunday School class she teaches, she said, “They are excited about the children’s program, about the curriculum. I am because I have two grandchildren that are involved” (NE/t/10-4/15).

Betty analyzed the congregational priorities in this way: “I know we have dedicated Sunday School teachers. Education programs for adults and children...I guess that would be the two main things” (BE/t/10-27/14). “We have been serious about Bible education for a long time,” asserted Valerie (VA/t/10-3/7). “We have really dedicated Bible teachers. We have different families who open their homes, and they provide the place

for hospitality for Bible teaching in the home” (VA/t/10-3/16). The women’s bible studies were mentioned frequently, and one of them was actually the entry point to the congregation for Mary. She shared:

[One of the church members] came up to our business and invited me to a bible study. She didn’t realize that [her husband] and I had not been in church for a while, so she invited me to a bible study; and, finally I was getting the point that I wanted to re-commit—that I wanted to be back in church. MA/t/10-27/9).

Teaching through sermons. A final, though certainly not secondary, means through which New Life accomplishes the goal of educating and equipping its members is through Jim’s sermons. Nine interviewees mentioned his ability to communicate and teach through his sermons as one of Jim’s strengths. “His sermons are very intellectual, but not overtly that you can’t understand it. He is teaching you, and you don’t even know you are being taught. For me personally, a lot of times it was like he crawled into my brain and talked about what I needed to be taught. I am sure it was the Holy Spirit,” shared Chad. “His knowledge of the Bible, the history of the church, and even his knowledge of other religions...how they play with or against Christianity...he uses in his sermons” (CH/t/10-27/5,9). “You can just tell that he has studied. He puts a lot into it...to feed His flock...to make sure we are spiritually fed and growing,” were Lunelle’s words describing another of Jim’s priorities (LU/t/9-26/12,15). Mary described his sermons as “...always Biblical. What he discusses with you and what he is teaching, it is the Word. It is biblical. He doesn’t, you know, try to make the word adjust for you and how you feel” (MA/t/10-27/4). According to her, one of Jim’s priorities is “teaching us the Word and what the Bible actually says, and keeping us on that” (MA/t/10-27/11). David agreed

about the focus of Jim's preaching, "He takes the Scriptures seriously" (DA/t/10-27/6).

Frank considered Jim's preaching as central to his work as pastor of New Life: "His preaching is...he keeps it centered on Christ. His preaching is centered on the Gospel...Everything else breeds out of that" (FR/t/10-4/10).

When asked to give guidance to one who desired to lead a turnaround, Jim reinforced this assessment of the importance of biblical preaching as part of his response.

If you are not preaching a message that is biblical in application, they question, 'Why would I want to go?' None of us, me included wake up in the morning and say, 'Boy, I wish I could go to church today.' There has to be a real good reason, or else they just don't. And so, you know, we just feel like everybody is just automatically going to go to church...they are not. You've got to offer them something. There has to be a reason for them to want to get up, so we try to create that reason. We try to create an atmosphere where somebody says, 'I don't want to miss that!' (JI/t/9-26/38)

Sherry confirmed Jim's thinking by delineating life-applicable preaching as one of the factors that hooked her at New Life: "I go to church to hear information about the Bible and how it applies to the current day, how the Scriptures apply to the person and the current Christian walk" (PS/t/10-4/3c).

Provide a Vision for the Future

Within a short time of talking with New Life's pastor and its congregants, one gets the impression that this congregation did not arrive where it is today by accident. Church members and elders alike were quick to ascribe credit to Jim's leadership in moving the congregation to its current level of membership strength and ministry vitality.

When interviewees were asked to assess Jim's leadership style, apart from describing his people skills, the most common responses involved his ability to function in a visionary capacity for the congregation. Seven respondents described their pastor's efforts to create a picture of where their church needed to be, and four others understood the importance of his ability to unite the church body in moving toward those goals.

Building unity. According to Ward, Jim's greatest strengths are "his ability to unite people. You can see those things in the city council and what he has done for our city. He also has the ability to project and see things out" (WA/t/10-31/13). Perhaps because of New Life's tumultuous past, this unity is not unnoticed or unappreciated among its longer-term members. According to Lunelle, there is "not a lot of quarreling going on" but rather a "good positive feeling that everything is 'ok'" (LU/t/9-26/19a). Tom agreed, "Jim is a communicator, too, and there's not the little cliques in church that I have seen before" (TC/t/10-3/8). Susan has experienced the life of the church as an employee and as a member—during good and bad times—and she described New Life as:

a very unified church as far as the majority of the membership goes. There's always gonna be some discontent, but as a whole, it is very sound, partially because of Jim...He is a very soft-spoken and a man that can dismantle things very easily. As far as the feel of the church right now, I think it is good. It is peaceful. (SU/t/10-4/15)

And, members understand their role in maintaining that unity as well. "One thing that we continually pray for is unity in our church, and we really think it has made a difference," shared Valerie (VA/t/10-3/7b).

Several understood that attaining and maintaining that unity is a dynamic process that sometimes involves dealing wisely with sources of disunity. In the session meeting the researcher observed, the elders and their pastor collectively developed strategies for dealing with potentially divisive issues within the congregation involving the proper leadership roles for persons dealing with difficult personal issues, a member who felt disenfranchised and with whom the pastor had been unable to work reconciliation, and an attendee whose behaviors had been disruptive and had made others feel unsafe in attending. They described a two-year process of setting and communicating expectations and a failure of the attendee to conform to acceptable behavior, culminating in their difficult decision at that point to ask the person to no longer attend (SM/fn/10-3). These individual issues and larger ones—such as the aforementioned issue of music in worship—arise regularly in a growing church. However, Lunelle noted the role the skillful leader plays in moving past those road bumps, “I think one of Jim’s strengths is how he handles problems. It is not a big blow up every time there is a small problem. He keeps the session and the staff...he keeps stuff like that very quiet. I think that’s very good” (LU/t/9-26/18).

Operating in trust. That close working relationship between the pastor and the session members has been a key to establishing a sense of shared mission within the church. When assessing the precipitants of the 1999 surge in growth, Valerie recalled, “I remember [Jim] being very close with the elders sometime around that period. He just couldn’t imagine a better group of people to work with” (VA/t/10-3/7b). Describing the relationship between Jim and the session, Susan shared:

[Jim] is very intelligent and therefore when he speaks they respectfully listen. They weigh what he says and most of the time they agree with what he is bringing before them. There's never any bitterness. They are very close. They function well as unit. (SU/t/10-4/9)

Jim agreed that the close, trusting relationship between the elders and him allowed him to be the driving force behind a unified direction for the congregation and offered:

They've asked me to be read up, learning, growing, studying and then advising. And so, they've trusted my leadership. And I acknowledge them, and I tried to do the best I can to trust any kind of correction or apprehension on their part and honor that. So there's been a great back and forth there. But I don't really think any of us have ever viewed it as being back and forth, me and the staff, one versus the other. I think we've always seen ourselves as a team, and they trusted me—that I've read up, I've studied up, I've prayed up, and I've thought about these things. I've made plans. They've never really bucked me on anything. At the same time I've really tried to be respectful that I wouldn't want to convince them of something I wasn't absolutely sure was what was best. So a real mutual trust. (JI/t/9-26/15)

John confirms Jim's assessment of that dependency upon and trust the session has in their pastor:

He will listen to input and gathers input and—and as an elder I can speak for this—we were relying on Jim's vision, and we would maybe kind of have to work within the parameters to make it work budget-wise and staff-wise and skill-wise. But he was the driving force behind us. (JO/t/10-31/8)

Sharing as one whose husband has been an elder, Cheryl observed the same thing, “Jim is pretty much their leader...He pretty much sets the priorities” (TC/t/10-3/15). Gary described his pastor’s leadership style as “with a plan and a mission,” and one of Jim’s primary behaviors for sustaining growth has been his effectiveness in “setting goals for the session” (GA/fn/10-5/9-10).

Developing and selling the vision. The process of developing that vision is one upon which Jim has reflected, and he shared some of his first steps:

I didn’t come in with an agenda, which by the way I think that is one of the things that helped make our ministry genuine. We didn’t come in with an idea of how things ought to be. We came in and really just kind of learned the congregation and built a corporate vision, rather than just our vision put on them. (JI/t/9-26/5b)

When asked later in the interview for advice to others who desired to lead change, he cycled back to that same idea:

You’ve got to be genuine. If you go into a place with an agenda, they are going to see right through that. They are not going to like it. They are going to think they are just tools for what you are trying to do personally. God’s not called every church to the same vision, and there’s not one method that will work. So, you’ve got to say, ‘What is it? Who are these people? What has God called them to do? What are their gifts and talents? And, how can we transform that to the community?’ (JI/t/9-26/36)

Chad described this vision-developing process as how Jim “guides with a soft hand. He looks for a quality circle, where he wants input from people. He may initiate the thought process, but he looks for other people’s interjections into it” (CH/t/10-27/8).

That process has led James to conclude that Jim leads with “a good vision of where God wants him to go” (JC/t/10-31/6). The ability to sell that vision, however, has been equally important to Jim and widely recognized. When assessing the factors that spurred the early growth, Ward assessed, “I think it was commitment. I think Jim had a vision for the church, and I think he projected that vision well. I think he had people to buy into that vision, and I think it came from that” (WA/t/10-31/8). In describing how Jim has gained buy-in to his vision, John said, “If you were using political terms, I like the term *gravitas*, charisma...He’s kind of got the ‘it’ factor” (JO/t/10-31/9). “He has a gift for motivating people,” shared Sherry. Her husband described one of Jim’s strengths as “having his vision,” and described his leadership style in terms of building support for that vision.

He has gotten those [people] and said ‘Let’s bring them in’; and basically he must sell the people on his vision. And he does a very good job at that...Even if the elders are sold, he is the one that goes to making announcements and elders support or whatever, other people support. He’s got a lot of support. (PS/t/10-4/6,7)

Chad believed that the staff priorities line up with Jim’s priorities, “because [Jim] is good about expounding upon what those are and kind of steering in that area” (CH/t/10-27/13). Jim affirmed the importance of his vision-casting, especially exhibiting leadership during preaching opportunities. “The church is led from the pulpit...Lead in the pulpit. Serve everywhere else.” He described his feeling that he had to be bold in the pulpit, but exhibit humility and grace outside of the pulpit (JI/t/9-25/3).

Remaining viable. New Life's vision is not a static, abstract concept that was developed 14 years ago, but as members and their leader indicated is one that changes based upon the people who are part of the congregation and the opportunities presented before the congregation. Valerie noted that one of Jim's strengths in the early years of ministry at New Life was that "He was willing to try new things. And, we would try something, and it didn't work; and, we would throw it out and try something else that maybe worked or didn't work but he was open to trying new things" (VA/t/10-3/7a). Ira agreed, "If something is not working, they don't just keep beating it in the bush. They try something else" (IR/t/10-31/3). Paula appreciated that effort to keep things fresh. "Brother Jim is not one to let things get stale. He always has something new and different...He always strives to change things" (GP/t/10-3/8). Richard offered:

Nothing is ever the same here...things are always changing. There's always individuals who will come and do things for a while, and then they decide, 'I am done for now,' We don't want people to feel like they are locked in...like we are using them or anything like that. (RI/t/9-26/3)

For Jim's part, that constant reevaluation is necessary for sustaining a viable ministry vision. In describing the largely successful Light of Hope food pantry ministry that began with the vision of a member and is enthusiastically supported by the church and its leadership, he shared:

If that no longer serves its purpose, we're also going to let it go. For instance, say if [the leader] doesn't want to do it anymore, and we don't have any leadership that anybody is fitted for, most churches would try to sustain that and wear people out; and, we won't do that. (JI/t/9-26/12)

Jim referred to this dynamic vision in this way:

We plan ahead. We try to think strategically, try to keep improving... We try to stay light on our feet...trying to think about where we're going to go tomorrow and how we're going to keep being able to meet the needs of the people. (JI/t/9-26/12a)

An example of that was the decision to build the new sanctuary that the congregation dedicated in 2004, a fulfillment of a vision that began as a discussion in session meetings six years earlier and a year before significant growth occurred (SR/fn/9). When the congregation dedicated its first official offering for the purpose of a new building in 2001 (SR/fn/15), Jim recalled, "We were starting to max out our room in the old building. We had no places left for fellowship, no place for Christian education" (JI/t/9-26/12a).

Speaking of the discomfort of embracing that vision, Scott recalled:

When we built the new sanctuary, that was a touchy thing, because we were running 200 or better every Sunday, and we didn't have room to seat people; and, we talked about building, and some people didn't want to. I said, 'If we don't, we won't grow,' and Jim was saying the same thing. When people come to visit, if they don't have a place to sit they won't come back. If it's half full, and they can find a seat, and they like it, they'll come back. But, if they can't find a seat, they won't come back. That's part of growth. (SC/t/9-26/9).

That vision for growth has not diminished now that the sanctuary has been built. A second worship service was added at 8:30 AM in 2007, along with a challenge from their pastor to begin to meet the needs of a congregation of 500 members—at a time when attendance was running near 300 (SR/fn/24). Frank recalled:

I remember about a year ago, [Jim] was talking about a certain level—if you study church growth—I think there is a certain level you get to and some other things have to be in place to go to the 500 level. He was talking about that a year-and-a-half or two years ago. Vision—there’s that word. (FR/t/10-4/9)

He also recalled Jim’s ideas of adding a television ministry, his opening the church to a home school group and other community events, to renting out the fellowship hall banquets and events, and other “outside the box” thinking to introduce the church to others (FR/t/10-4/9). Jim believes the church is still called to grow but understands possible contextual limitations and the necessity they might face to change the way they measure growth.

I don’t know how big we’re going to get here in this community. There’s no church around here that has over 350 in worship. I don’t know how big it is to possibly grow in this community. And so if we start to reach that ceiling, . . . a ceiling where you can continue to invest and it’s going to take more dollars, more energy, and everything, . . . If we reach our ceiling, that doesn’t mean we have to reach the ceiling of our average in ministry. (JI/t/9-26/22b)

Speaking of 5- to 10-year goals and elaborating on what he means by moving beyond their ceiling, he shared, “I think probably trying to establish another church would be a real potential thing” (JI/t/9-26/32).

Maintaining focus. Maintaining that forward progress and vision-focus appeared to be especially tough as this juncture in New Life’s journey. The new sanctuary, though celebrated and enjoyed by the membership and leaders, came at costly price of about \$1.4 million. Much of that debt still hangs above the congregation, and it was a noticeable

concern for many of the respondents. Each of the elders serving currently who were interviewed, all four staff members interviewed, and multiple members mentioned the priority of paying of existing debt as a hindrance to expansion of ministries. Speaking of the building debt, Valerie shared, “It hinders what else can be done because we have that responsibility. If we didn’t have that mortgage hanging over our heads, we could perhaps be doing more” VA/t/10-4/15). John, who is currently on the session, perhaps summed it up best:

I am a believer if you look at our budget, you will see our priorities. Just like at home...What you spend your money on is where you prioritize. So based on that, we put a high amount of money into this church building. I was hoping we would concentrate more to pay that off because that would free up money down the road to utilize elsewhere. (JO/t/10-31/15)

Jim agreed, “Paying off the building so that it frees up resources and good stewardship is an important thing for a lot of our folks” (JI/t/9-26/32). Yet, in spite of that pressure, some gladly share that Jim avoids a “push for money” (GP/t/10-3/7). The current recession seems to have put the squeeze on the church financially, yet those concerns seemed only voiced in private conversations with the researcher. The weekly offering needed was scrolled among other pre-worship announcements, but was the only observed notation of financial needs (WO/fn/9-26/3). As a matter of fact, one former elder shared jokingly that perhaps Jim was too focused on ministry and too unconcerned about the finances:

The day we moved into our new sanctuary and had the dedication (We had 600 people.), he forgot the offering. Someone told us (and I think it was his father)

Tim forgot the offering. I told him never to do that again. Everybody that worked on the building was there, and they probably all came prepared to make a pretty good donation back to the church because they had worked there and made money off the church” (GP/t/10-4/7).

Jim was acutely aware of the debt, but was adamant that the congregational priorities of ministering to children, providing quality worship, discipling members, and expanding mission work must remain at the forefront (JI/t/9-26/21). And, in providing guidance for those who desire to lead a turnaround process, Jim articulately shared the following about the need for clear focus:

You’ve got to set your mind on that you are going to turn it around. It doesn’t happen by accident. Everything you do has got to be for that purpose. You are not going to hit what you are not aiming for. I’ve wanted to grow the church. It has been my desire to grow the church. I am not apologizing for that. I’ve thought from the beginning that a healthy body is a growing body and a dying body is a shrinking body. And, so our job is to reproduce, to make disciples. So, number one, you’ve got to be purposeful about it; and, you’ve got to, number two, evaluate what your strengths are. I’ve heard people say you want to strengthen your weaknesses. No, you want to go where your strengths lie. You want to do what you do, and do it well. (JI/t/9-26/34).

Empower and Mobilize the Laity

As has already been noted, some in the congregation felt that their pastor needed to release some of the details of ministry and empower others more—to follow more fully Ben’s wisdom that “a pastor can multiply himself by using the people” (BC/t/10-27/13).

However, while by Jim's own admission that continues to be his struggle, five respondents indicated that their pastor's ability to get others involved in ministry within the church was a key behavior for Jim that has contributed to sustaining growth at New Life. Four others suggested he is gifted in the ability to help persons match their passions with opportunities to serve, and three described the success of the church in affirming gifts in its members and mobilizing them to serve. And, when trying to place a label on Jim's leadership style, four utilized the term "team builder" as a positive descriptor for their pastor.

Matching passion with purpose. Jim theorizes, "The goal of the church should be equipping the laity to do the work" (JI/t/9-26/33). Yet, he was also quick to explain that building laity-led ministries is a process that begins in very much the same way that his vision was developed—by discovering the gifts and passions of those within the church and connecting them with opportunities to mobilize those skills. He suggested that one of his behaviors that has contributed most to sustaining turnaround has been "trying to invest in leadership, trying to find people who were gifted."

And one of the things we learned early on is the call process that LOGOS ministries teaches, that you really pray and seek who might be who God has called to do ministry. You go to that person, and you tell them that you feel like God is calling you, and you pray about this and seek Him. And, normally that is just a huge affirmation process, and that's for people that feel the Lord already laid that on their heart... We don't establish ministries and then ask people to fill them. We try to find out where people are already having a leaning towards the ministries, and then we try to equip them. That's a kind of a backward thing that

churches do. And, so many of our ministries have started out with a passion somebody had and also corresponding skills. (JI/t/9-26/12b)

Frank described the strength of the congregation as a fruit of this philosophy that has permeated the church:

It is an openness, a friendliness...welcome that you can have a place, and you can do your calling without somebody standing over you. You have freedom to just take that calling and use that skill as part of this church. There is an openness about people who feel free to do whatever God wants them to do kinda thing. (FR/t/10-4/16)

Valerie characterized the congregational culture in these terms:

We have people who work our food pantry, and that is their passion. We have people who work with the youth, and that is their passion. We have really dedicated Bible teachers. We have different families who open their homes and they provide the place for the hospitality for Bible teaching in the home. We have the mission team that is getting ready to go to South Africa, and that is where their focus is right now. To say what the focus of the congregation is...is really hard. I think we all work hard to support these teams ...Recognize their gifts, and use the gifts, and then support one another. (VA/t/10-3/16)

So, for Jim, his goal his been, "I try to get the right people in the right place and then trust them to do what God's called them to do" (JI/t/9-26/16b).

Building volunteerism in ministries. Many members affirmed Jim's success in accomplishing those goals. "Team leader might be a good word to describe him," shared

Tom, "Our church is that way." And, Cheryl finished the thought, "We don't have any one person who seems to stand out as "I'm the leader" (TC/t/10-3/10). Ira said:

He is a team builder. It is definitely not about him. He had rather 50 be up there on the stand talking and giving their vision for the church and their confessions than he would be up there preaching. He would rather see the whole church come as one than just one leading everybody. (IR/t/10-31/6)

Though pushing him to delegate more, Ben was quick to acknowledge Jim's successes at increasing involvement in various ministries. "He just has the charisma to reach out and work with people and get them involved. That is a special talent in itself" (BC/t/10-27/11). Gary's first response in assessing Jim's strengths was concise, "getting people to volunteer" (GA/fn/10-5/11). Ward offered:

Jim has an ability to make people take part...to feel ownership...People burn out, and you have to have the ability to find someone else to fill in; and, he's always been able to find someone else to take over a job. The thing about him is you don't feel like your arm is being twisted to do it. (WA/t/10-31/9-10)

Sometimes priorities of high expectations and quality worship might compete with this notion. Still Sherry noted, "He can draw people in and get them involved. But, there are people up there at times singing that certainly don't have the expertise or the abilities that he does, yet he always makes a real effort to involve them" (PS/t/10-4/4a). His success at involving members in ministry led her husband to conclude, "The volunteer program is very strong" (PS/t/10-4/13). A few referred to Jim as a permission granter, yet with a loose sense of oversight to ensure that activities and ministries correspond with the goals and vision of the congregation. "Jim has been open...Jim has

never said, ‘No, you can’t do anything,’ ...but run it by the session first,” shared James (JC/t/10-31/9). “He is a good organizer, but he still wants to let people do their thing,” assessed Scott. “He is not one to go in and tell people, ‘You can’t do this or that.’ He will let them lead their group as long as they don’t fall out in left field or somewhere” (SC/t/9-26/11).

Richard indicated a congruence of philosophy with Jim for building congregational involvement in ministry:

If somebody has a talent, it would be to their benefit, as well as the church and the kingdom, if they use their talent. We try to encourage people...to do and be a part of the different ministries...The attitude of [the staff] is...we want to be there to encourage people if they want to help. But, we don’t want to browbeat people into doing something that they really don’t want to do. I am not afraid to ask, but they really shouldn’t be afraid to say ‘no.’ (RI/t/9-26/3)

And, according to Frank, the church has benefited from this “good spirit of cooperation. People are still stepping up without arms being twisted. There is an openness for people to step forward and assume leadership” (FR/t/10-4/17).

Examples of that openness and immediate involvement were plenteous. Upon arriving on-site to observe the first worship service, the researcher observed tables set up in the foyer outside of the sanctuary with papers available for members to sign up for various ministry teams within the congregation. Twenty-one different ministry teams were represented on those sheets, representing a wide variety of opportunities for members to exercise their gifts or service—special events, student ministry, mowing (one month), receptionist (church office), Light of Hope (food pantry), facility, nursery,

scrapbooking, missions, women's ministry, senior adult, WOW (children), men's ministry, video/sound, usher/greeter, vacation bible school, Sunday School, congregational care, kitchen, prayer, and worship team/choir. The youth pastor encouraged members to sign up during announcements at the beginning of each service (WO/fn/9-26/1,3).

Interviewees were quick to respond with examples of members being incorporated quickly into and others leading ministries. Susan described one who for a few years has done the monthly newsletter for the church because she runs a printing service out of her house (SU/t/10-4/8b). Jim shared about the success of one of its largest ministries, the Light of Hope food pantry:

That just grew out of somebody having a passion. I said, 'We'll give you a room. We'll put you in the budget. We'll help you recruit staff. You give us the outline and direction we need to be a successful ministry.' (JI/t/9-26/12)

Richard plays a vital role in that expansion of ministry opportunity as well. He started a group of nine singers called Total Praise that has traveled to multiple venues and churches of multiple denominations, serving as a source of outreach for some who were interested in music ministries. Additionally, last year the church did a musical that used an orchestra, recruiting student musicians from both high school bands, that have stayed and become a part of New Life (RI/t/9-26/1a,11).

Ben summarized Jim's philosophy when he commented:

The pastor wants to expand ministry outreach so there will be something for every age group. He has worked hard over the last couple of years to find things to

connect people into what is available at the church. I think his goal is have something, to connect every person to something in the church. (BC/t/10-27/15)

“If there is something you want to do...teach a class or whatever, there is something there,” continued Cindy. And, Ben finished, “Or if you play a musical instrument or whatever...Brother Jim is trying very hard to get everyone involved” (BC/t/10-27/15).

Mobilizing compassion through missions. A very practical manifestation of the compassionate, caring character of the congregation, as described earlier, meeting this principle of mobilizing the laity of the church in ministry to others, is the priority of missions and benevolence that Jim says “has gone up significantly” in recent years (JI/t/9-26/21). Jim acknowledges, “I came from Cornerstone Church, and they sponsor 20 missionaries, so it’s something that I had on my heart for the timing to be right” (JI/t/9-26/22). Session records do not indicate any action regarding mission work until the February, 1999 meeting, where youth mission work and the formation of a “Missions Board” were discussed. However, other than minor financial support for a person doing mission work in an unmentioned location that was recorded in the fall of 2000, the session records are fairly silent about mission work until 2003 (SR/fn/11,14). A significant event occurred within the congregation during that window. Lunelle recounted those events:

We had a young couple who came to the church who were from South Africa, and they had moved to the United States. And, she was an occupational therapist, and he was an engineer; and, they wanted to do something back for their home...people in their homeland. Her father suggested that they help build this

church. And one of the first things the elders said was, ‘Well, we will send them \$10,000.’ And yet, we don’t have \$10,000 lying around anywhere. (LU/t/9-26/20)

This was a significant event in the identity of the congregation in April, 2003. In June of the previous year, the session had voted to borrow \$881,000—over three times their total income in 2002—from the presbytery to help pay for the costs of the sanctuary construction that had begun that October. In spite of the large indebtedness the church had assumed in investing in its own growth and future, at that critical juncture in the church’s history, the session defined its focus beyond itself and voted to send that \$10,000 to help fund the construction of a church in Wolmaranstad, South Africa (SR/fn/19a). In November of that year, those records discuss New Life’s “Sister Church” in South Africa, and voted to send an additional offering of 10% of its annual Thanksgiving Loyalty Offering that had most years helped maintain and expand their own facilities (SR/fn/19b). In March of the following year, the church began preparations to send a team of members to their sister church to help complete the construction of that facility and to conduct a bible school and other evangelistic events (SR/fn/21). That trip occurred in May, 2006 and solidified an on-going relationship with that church that defines much activity at New Life. Even though he has personally never gone, George shared:

We finished building a church in Africa, and we have a team that goes every two years; and, we have a vacation bible school and revival and stay for two weeks.

We completely finished that church...put windows in it and concreted the floors...I am proud of that. (GP/t/10-3/18)

Lunelle finished:

It seems like we always come up with the money when we need it, but there is not an overabundance. So, I don't know how much money we ended up spending in South Africa, but went over there and built it and poured the floors. They have bible school over there. (LU/t/9-26/20)

One of the churches most tenured members excitedly evaluated a congregational strength with the statement, "We are very missionary-minded" (GP/t/10-3/18). That 2006 calendar year marked a second significant year in that mission-mind shift. Not only did the congregation send a team to South Africa that year, they commissioned a team of members to go to Gulfport, Mississippi to help with Katrina reconstruction, financially supported another member who did mission work in Romania, and established *Missions and Outreach* as one of the seven core areas of ministry within the congregation, charging an elder with its oversight (SR/fn/23). A team of members nurtured the relationship with their sister church when they returned in 2008, and another team is raising funds currently for a 2011 trip back to South Africa. Paula shared some of their mission activities:

They send Christmas boxes to the children [in South Africa] every year...After Katrina, we had trips to Mississippi...The way they raise the money are from dinners...taco dinners, spaghetti, Italian dinners...that is one of their ways. The young people help in the yard sales. We had a bridal show, just different things for people to participate in. (GP/t/10-3/18)

Her husband George added, "We have a couple of ladies who go to an Indian reservation every year, too. And our people support these missions good" (GP/t/10-3/18).

Gary discussed some negativity he had heard from a minority within the congregation for the large amount of money that has been invested in the South Africa work, describing some as “jealous” of that investment. However, he suggested that the church would have never invested \$14,000 into their community in that way, and that even though he had never gone, and did not feel called to go, he stated “I love it.” He believed the near 500 people who had made decisions for Christ were more than worth the cost, and he embraced his “roles” to help cook and do events to help raise funds to send those who have the passion to go (GA/fn/6). Lunelle shared her thoughts on whether she viewed the efforts as worth the cost and said, “Five or six hundred people made decisions for Christ...that doesn’t happen every day” (LU/t/9-26/20).

That “timing” has become right to involve the New Life members to extend their arms of compassion and ministry to others through missions and benevolence for Jim in the last six years, a mobilization he sees expanding in future years:

It’s become more on the front burner for us recently, just sponsoring people from [the city] who are going out into the mission field, raising support for the ministry over in South Africa. And, so that’s become something I preach about more. As a matter of fact, every six weeks I’ll do what’s called a Missions Moment in the worship service, just keeping that before the folks. I try to bring missionaries...just trying to keep that before the people, because it seems to be the logical next step. I don’t know how big we’re going to get, here in this community...if I’m here long-term, one of the things that I would want to see is just to plant another church and maybe plant a church across the sea somewhere. And that way we can celebrate that growth. (JI/t/9-26/22)

Involving new members in ministry. The rapid involvement of new members into ministry teams and positions of leadership is an evident phenomenon at New Life. Even though she had only been a member for two years, Sherry shared that she was put in charge of a women's retreat the previous fall (PS/t/10-4/2c). David described his quick move to ministry involvement upon joining the congregation:

We were welcomed immediately upon coming in to the Christmas Choir. They had already been practicing for several weeks, but Richard wanted us right in and got us involved in that. Frank has been involving us in different ministries with the elderly...The main priority of this congregation is to involve as many people as possible in the things of the Lord as they are given the ability to do. (DA/t/10-27/5,9)

His son, Jason, a junior in high school and a member of the city school's state champion marching band, knows the feeling of immediate involvement as well. On the second Sunday of the researcher's observations, Jason played the drums for worship though, like his parents, he has only been a part of this congregation for a year (WO/fn/10-3/4). James discovered that the congregation not only welcomed him but his ideas as well. Shortly after James and his wife began attending New Life two years ago, they started a small group for bible study in their home. He was impressed that he was invited to come share with the session how they were doing their group, as the leadership expressed a desire to grow that ministry within the church (JC/t/10-31/9b).

Another interesting phenomenon at New Life is the large number of retired and bi-vocational ministers who seem to settle on this congregation. Jim noted the strength of the leadership at New Life during his comments in the final worship service which the

researcher observed, especially noting that eight ministers besides himself were currently a part of the congregation (WO/fn/10-31/1). George shared:

Somehow we have a draw with ministers that retire and come to our church, not only from the Cumberland denomination, but from other different denominations that decide to come to our church. And, I think we can credit Jim with that some way. (GP/t/10-3/16)

Frank attributes that to Jim's ability to see the value in their gifts without feeling threatened in his leadership and offered:

He allows people to develop and gives them a chance to speak...he shares that leadership without feeling that he is losing something, but yet you still know that he is in charge. That is a good thing. He shares with the ones who are willing to speak. That is a God thing...If he finds out that you have a gift, and you are willing to speak, he lets you. He doesn't feel challenged in his leadership ability by that. (FR/t/10-4/18)

David recalled that even though they had visited the church on one occasion as they were searching for a church home, it was actually at a community event where they felt their first "hook" to the congregation:

We happened to run into Jim and his family at a community activity, and we remembered him. Of course, he didn't remember us from one visit here at the church. But once I introduced myself—told him who I was—he was excited about my bringing 40 years of ministry and the things that could involve in his church. He wanted us to come. He welcomed us to come. It was a warm and genuine desire to be involved in the church; and that was refreshing, because we had not

seen that...Jim is not threatened by other pastors or preachers. I think that is why there is a magnet here. As I said, at a dozen other churches, they were threatened immediately if they found out I was a pastor. Even the other independent Baptist church here in town—well, there were a couple—rather than say, ‘We want you here because you are a part of us,’ it was ‘Why are you here?’ Jim doesn’t have that attitude. Like I say, he really knew who I was and how long I had been in the ministry, and he told me, ‘I want that 40 years of experience in our church.’

(DA/t/10-27/3,15)

Gary acknowledged that a couple of those who have worked with the congregation or become a part of the congregation were not original fans of Jim’s at first, and perhaps Jim felt “held back” in some sense by them as he was proceeding through the ordination process. However, the elder noted that Jim loved the detractors and empowered them to do ministry within the church and earned their trust (GA/fn/10-5/11).

The ministry to and through these ministers may be a manifestation of Jim’s vision of expanding New Life’s ministry beyond its “ceiling.” Although Frank’s four-year tenure as pastor of a small, country church ended on the last Sunday the researcher was on-site, it was certainly unique that his wife, children, and grandchildren were all active in the New Life while he served as pastor of a church that only had Sunday morning services as well as a part-time ministry assistant at New Life. A former pastor of Cornerstone Church has become ordained in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, pastors a small church in a neighboring county, and attends New Life when not fulfilling pastoral responsibilities. And, while the researcher was on-site, the congregation celebrated the call of another member to be the pastor of a small, country church. Frank

described that process of sharing and sending, “In a way you are losing, but in a way you are gaining. I think that’s unique” (FR/t/10-4/18). Several mentioned the Sunday night services during the summer where a different one of these ministers preached each week, serving both to give Jim a rest, but to also validate their importance within the congregation, and to provide additional resources for Christian education, leadership, and ministry. “It’s people that have rallied here for one reason or another,” shared Frank. “God has used them to come here. And they feel free to meld that, and it helps you...That’s leadership at its best” (FR/t/10-4/18).

Elevating qualified individuals to leadership positions. One other area that distinguishes New Life, and Jim would suggest has contributed significantly to ability to sustain growth, is not only their commitment to get new members involved in ministry, but also into positions of leadership. As has already been noted, Ira became a part of this congregation in 2004 after supervising the clean-up for the sanctuary construction. For the last year, he has served the congregation as the head usher, and he feels that is partly because some in leadership positions recognized his background and skill set. He offered:

I have that job because I have a security background with the military and government, and that is why [Jim] came to me. He usually tries to put someone in that position that has some experience instead of bringing someone in there with a blank slate. (IR/t/10-31/3)

For him, he described Jim’s priorities in a single simple statement: “To make sure the right people are in the leadership roles” (IR/t/10-31/10).

Jim is adamant that “most churches aren’t set up where they can train and develop new leadership.” He insists that a process whereby elders are elected for a period of

time—3 years in the case of New Life—serves a double purpose. “You’ve got to be able to get rid of somebody that’s causing trouble and also get rid of somebody that’s dead weight, because they’re taking the place of somebody that should be doing the job.” One of the things he is most pleased with is that “I think we’ve ordained...since I’ve been here, probably 18 to 20 new elders.” But, they have not simply elevated members arbitrarily. They approach the process prayerfully, and attempt to give some an opportunity to discover the responsibilities of serving as elder. Jim continued:

Another thing we’ve done is we’ve brought those guys in and really asked them to just sit in for a year, you know, for somebody we’re praying about. And a lot of times they’ll serve as a clerk, so they understand the business and so forth, and they’re not dead weight in there. And after a year, we have a feel for them and they have a feel for how things are done, and they either serve or they don’t. And we actually had a guy that said, ‘No, this isn’t for me.’ And, he was right. (JI/t/9-26/28)

Perry is one of those who was selected as a leader and elevated through this process. After joining the congregation in 2007, he was asked to serve as clerk in 2009 and then asked to serve a three-year term as an elder beginning in 2010. When asked how he came to this position of leadership so quickly within the church, Perry was not entirely certain. He noted that he had interacted with the pastor socially on a few occasions and he had taught Sunday School on several occasions, and suggested that his mode of teaching was relating various events in life to the Scripture. But, ultimately he could only conclude, “I would say it’s a combination of him seeing where I was going in terms of

what I represent my life to be and also what abilities that I could contribute” (PS/t/10-4/14). Yet he represents a core value for Jim – leadership recognition and development.

Sharing responsibility for ministry. “I think his priority is to empower the staff and the elders, then allow them to grow,” shared Richard (RI/t/9-26/8). A shared ministry paradigm has taken a more tangible form in recent years with the additions of the ARMS (Area of Responsibility in Ministry) concept in 2007 and the Rainbow List in 2009 (SR/fn/24,26). The elders have divided the work of the church into nine key areas of ministry. Each elder, then, is the primary contact and takes primary responsibility for oversight of the ministry within that particular area. Those areas include missions, facilities, discipleship, staff and budget, congregational activities, off-campus activities and women’s ministries, pastoral ministries, communications and technology, greeter and nursery ministries, and session clerk. Additionally, every family in the congregation is assigned one of nine colors. Each elder then is assigned a color and assumes a measure of pastoral care responsibility for those members on his Rainbow List. Elders are charged to stay aware of ministry needs of those within their charge and to be a primary source of communication and connection with those members. They readily admit that some do a better job than others of taking care of those assigned to them, but it reveals a conscious effort by Jim to minister through others, and for the elders to assume a measure of responsibility for the ministry of the congregation. For Jim it also means that, “Failing is not entirely my fault, but it also not me who gets the pat on the back” when things go well (JI/fn/9-25/1-2).

Frank discerned this sharing of ministry as revealing a key priority for Jim:

Team leadership...where he wouldn't have to be concerned about little bitty stuff because he is gonna shepherd the sheep, ...shepherd the shepherds, the elders. So, discipling the elders and leaders...I would say would be a big thing he is interested in. (FR/t/10-4/13)

Jim agreed:

You gotta help people in your congregation realize what they are called to do and help them do it and do it well. So the pastor has to be the equipper. The leadership has to be equippers and trainers. They have to have access to resources and be able to offer and suggest to train people to accomplish their goals. (JI/t/9-26/35)

Tim, and his other accountability partner Ward, agreed that the best leaders raise up other leaders and empower them to accomplish the necessary tasks effectively, even after the leader is gone. According to Ward, "I said he started 14 years ago building for the day he leaves. And I think those [priorities] are something he would continue to do...to have a church where he is least needed." Ward credits Jim with developing the session, improvement of pastoral care of a growing congregation through the Rainbow List, with developing deacons and others to fill ministry spots, and taking people's ideas and giving them nourishment to grow (WA/t/10-31/16). Gary agreed that one of Jim's greatest contributions to New Life has been a continual challenging of the session to get better, to step into roles in which they may not have previously felt comfortable, and to make sure they are equipped to minister to the people who enter their congregation (GA/fn/10-5/9,11,13).

The concept of empowering and mobilizing leaders was probably best summarized by Ward. Near the end of the interview, he pulled out a piece of paper on

which he had handwritten a quote from Sam Walton that he had learned during his years serving in management of Wal-Mart stores and presented it to the researcher. Before reading it, he said, "I've always thought Jim did this."

Go to the people. Learn from them. Serve them. Plan with them. Start with what they know and build on what they have. And when the best leaders leave, the people will say, 'We have done it ourselves.' (WA/t/10-31/12).

Conclusion

New Life Church was organized in 1959 while still meeting in the basement of the parsonage built for its founding pastor. New Life experienced significant growth under the talented leadership of its pastor couple but endured a split in 1974. Because the independent-minded pastor refused to support denominational missionaries and programs and became incensed that sufficient numbers did not embrace his vision of building a new sanctuary, he along with 165 of the church's 280 members, and 9 of its 15 elders left to form another church in town, leaving a broken church that would endure a string of short-term pastorates for the next 20 years.

That period of plateau and decline was marked by maintenance mentality and little in the way of outreach and mission. New Life members did speak favorably of the 4-year pastorate of "Henry," and still revealed some noticeable surprise that he left after only four years. Though his final year was marked by significant new membership total membership had only changed grown to 140 by 1994. The addition of the LOGOS ministry to children and its residual involvement of families proved beneficial to growth during that period and upon its reinstatement under the current pastor.

After Henry's pastorate, the congregation endured a devastating 2-year pastorate of one who most described as "inexperienced" and "immature," certainly ill-equipped for the task of pastoring New Life Church. "Jerry" began a military chaplaincy in the National Guard shortly after coming to New Life, and many felt that his divided attention was a factor leading to initial difficulties. However, what some described as poor interpersonal, people skills, a low opinion of women, and poor leadership that led to division and confrontation led to another split within the congregation with worship attendance dropping as low as 50 attendees at the point Jerry was asked to resign.

In 1996, New Life secured as their pastor the services of the associate pastor/youth pastor of the independent church started from the 1974 split. Jim was a music major in college who married a well-respected local girl and had gained a positive reputation in town for his work at "Cornerstone Church" and through his work as an assistant director of the band at the city high school. The couple began building a foundation for growth that blossomed in 1999 with 16 professions of faith and 41 new members. That growth has sustained to the present time necessitating the construction of a new sanctuary in 2004 and worship attendance that now exceeds the pre-1974 numbers.

Interviewees describe two attributes of the New Life pastor that have been central to his ability to turnaround and sustain growth within the congregation. Jim is a people person who exhibits the ability to connect with others with a sincere sense of care and compassion. Additionally, he is a detail person, one who holds high expectations and has been intricately involved most every aspect of the ministry that has developed at New Life during his pastorate.

The researcher discovered three behaviors of the pastor that respondents felt contributed significantly to initiating turnaround at New Life as well as sustaining that momentum for over a decade. Those behaviors included: developing a community presence; providing quality, meaningful worship; and equipping the flock through strong youth and Christian education programs for the congregation. Interviewees revealed two additional behaviors that they perceived have been integral in growing their congregation—providing a vision for the future and empowering and mobilizing the laity.

Chapter IV has served to present findings from interviews with those who experienced the splits, plateaus, declines, turnaround, and sustained growth in the history of New Life Church. Their perceptions, along with corroborating evidence gained by the researcher, reveal catalysts for the turnaround at New Life. In Chapter V the researcher will utilize the data in this chapter to articulate the revealed answers to the research questions that guided this study. The researcher will discuss how these findings interact with those assertions set forth in the literature of school and church turnaround efforts as well as the theoretical framework employed for this study. Additionally, the researcher will offer implications for these findings as they might inform the cross-contextual efforts of those desiring to lead turnaround in other spiritual and educational settings.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, and IMPLICATIONS

The profit or loss incentive in business has generally served to insure that those in leadership positions of those organizations regularly take introspective looks at their practices that have stymied their progress or fostered failure and propagated those that have produced growth and vitality. Until recent decades, however, the relative monopoly of the education of our youth received from the public school systems seemed to produce no urgency to evaluate and improve the systems; at the same time, a fatalistic, evolutionary mindset of “survival of the fittest” seemed to guide church denominations down a path of letting small, struggling churches die in preference to the burgeoning mega-churches. However, global competitiveness and moral outrage at failing schools fueled a reform movement driven by high stakes accountability in educational systems in the last 20 years. Almost in step, the information explosion and emergence of a church growth movement in theological academia energized church leaders to pursue revitalization of struggling churches.

Both school and church leaders have embraced the notion that many of the dynamics of successful leadership hold similar values cross-contextually. Organizational and leadership theory and practice have become useful sources for guidance to those who wish to breathe new life and direction into schools and churches. Additionally, these turnaround leaders have learned from those within their own professions who have turned the fortunes of schools and churches that were once ineffective and without clear

purpose. A growing body of turnaround literature and research now coexists with effective leadership theory. The active dialogue of organizational, school, and church leadership research has suggested that successful leadership principles are often very similar in various contexts. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to illuminate successful practices of a turnaround leader in a rural church that are applicable cross-contextually, so as to inform the leadership efforts of various organizations seeking to reproduce organizational renewal on a wide-scale basis.

This qualitative case study was guided by three research questions:

- 1) In a rural church that has experienced revitalization (“organizational turnaround”), how do the pastor and congregants perceive the experience?
- 2) How do they perceive the characteristics and behaviors of the pastor as “catalysts” in this transformation?
- 3) What leadership principles of successful turnaround church efforts can be extracted from their experiences that are comparable to those reported in the literature on school revitalization efforts?

The findings of this study indicate a strong relationship between the successful practices of the turnaround leader in a small, rural church in south central Kentucky and those that have been purported by others who have led turnaround in church settings, as well as those reported in the literature of those who have led successful school revitalization. These findings suggest that there are certain tenets of personality and individual giftedness that contribute to the ability of a leader to exact turnaround. However, for those who do not possess those extraordinary personal gifts, there is also

good news, in that there are also specific *actions* that are “doable” for most any leader that also seem to significantly and consistently contribute to organizational renewal.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1

Chapter IV summarized the consistent tenets of discussion that interviewees shared regarding their perceptions of the turnaround experience. The current pastor led the church through a period of turnaround and rebound that began to show significant fruit in his 4th year as pastor, but he has also led the congregation to sustain that healthy growth and expansion of ministry for a period of 10 years. He became the leader of this church after a short, divisive pastorate by one that most felt was immature, inexperienced, and ill-equipped to lead the congregation that one of the original members described as “tough to pastor” (FR/t/10-4/4a). The church had lost 30 members in his 1st year as pastor, and worship attendance had dropped to near 50 of the 118 “active” members still on the church roll. Members described Jerry, the pastor during that period, as “rough and abrasive” (JO/t/10-31/3), “never able to connect with people” (BC/t/10-27/5), and “argumentative” (GP/t/10-3/5); and in turn the congregation was characterized by “jealousy” (SC/t/10-3/4), “discontent” (SC/t/10-4/4), and “a lot of quarrelling” (LU/t/9-26/3).

Perhaps because of the time that had elapsed between the actual turnaround and the time of this study, interviewees shared very few specific experiences from the early years of Jim’s pastorate. However, what seemed to stand out to them was the contrast of those early years of turnaround with the preceding years. The absence of the turmoil and strife that dominated Jerry’s pastorate—which seemed to break open the wounds of the

devastating split two decades earlier—led many of them to simply describe those turnaround years as peaceful and to establish unity as a congregational priority. Interviewees did not describe events as much as they did their pastor. In contrast to Jerry, Jim was “able to relate to people” (BC/t/10-27/7) and was “a healing person...a soothing-type person” (NE/t/10-4/12). In contrast to a congregation that had been forced to “take sides” (JO/t/10-31/4), one staff member shared, “I was very impressed that he did not allow division but he worked toward peace, unity, and wholeness of the body of Christ and would not tolerate any disunity” (SH/t/10-4/5b). It was not that opportunities for difficulty evaporated, but rather the turnaround pastor managed those moments of conflict more effectively. “I think one of Jim’s strengths is how he handles problems. It is not a big blow up every time there is a problem...He keeps stuff like that very quiet,” shared one long-time member (LU/t/9-26/18). Another agreed, “While being compassionate, he ignores a lot of things that could be just trifle and moves on to the things that are most important” (SH/t/10-4/6).

The notion that members did not perceive “turnaround” as much as they perceived a “lack of discord” was reinforced by the fact that interviewees generally spoke favorably of Henry’s leadership, even though there was little net growth during that time. While many noted the importance to eventual turnaround of Henry introducing the LOGOS youth ministry to the congregation (FR/t/10-4/4b; LU/t/9-26/3; WA/t/10-31/3) and its subsequent value when reinstated by Jim (BC/t/10-27/8; GP/t/10-3/10), most seemed relatively surprised that Henry’s pastorate was part of a period of essential plateau in the life of the congregation. Speaking of those 4 years, one said, “It was good” (GP/t/10-3/4), and another said, “I think the church was surprised when he left” (LU/t/9-26/5). His 4-

year pastorate was long in comparison to others in the years after the initial split, and the 20 new members in 1993 were perhaps a precursor of a turnaround that was to come had he stayed longer. Though the only event mentioned as a source of conflict during Henry's pastorate was his divorce and re-marriage prior to coming to New Life (TC/t/10-3/5), most appeared not to recall that many were disappearing from the congregation at the same time that new members were joining, resulting in little net growth. Because there did not appear to be specific events that were causing persons to leave and because the consensus was that Henry and his wife were well-liked, the majority of interviewees define the period in fond terms, rather than as a period of plateau and nominal growth.

After experiencing the hurt of Henry's surprisingly abrupt departure and the subsequent painful, tumultuous years that followed under Jerry, it is not surprising that members interviewed recalled most specifically the loving, caring, out-going nature that Jim shared during the early years of his pastorate. In small, rural churches where connection to a minister is very important for congregants, the people that Jim described as "hurting" and "scared," and a culture that he described as "precarious," experienced a pastor who simply, "tried to be very loving to them" (JI/t/10-7/5a). As was noted in Chapter IV, the damage of the initial split was exacerbated by a succession of short-term pastorates that provided little opportunity for members to connect and receive the love and care of their pastor that they desired. Obviously benefiting from the "acceptance" and "credibility" he received because of the local connections of his wife and her family and his established work in the community, Jim seemed to provide caring for them and their community for which the members had desired. Thus, those interviewed did not seem to perceive "turnaround" as much as they did healing, caring, and love.

Research Question 2

There is little question that members interviewed for this study at New Life realized the crucial role that Jim has played in leading the turnaround and growth in their church. However, leaders can only lead when followers are willing to follow. Jim was quick to note that he inherited a congregation that was “moderately desperate” and “ready to rally” (JI/t/9-26/5a). While all seven catalysts that were outlined in Chapter IV were enlivened as a product of Jim’s personality or leadership, he was quick to credit a “genuine hunger to be better, to be more than they were” (JI/t/9-26/5c) as providing a fertile ground for fruitful “followership.” Others agreed. “I think the people at New Life were just ready to do whatever it took to get the church to grow...that they were open to new leadership, to new ideas, and to new ways of worship,” shared one (LU/t/9-26/6b). Another offered, “It seemed that whatever he thought or felt like we should do, everybody got behind him; because we’d been through so much” (NE/t/10-4/9).

When interviewees were asked if they could recall specific events or actions that prompted the initial dramatic growth in 1999, three mentioned a split that had occurred at Covenant Church because of the dismissal of the pastor. According to those respondents, some who had left New Life in their initial split actually returned during this period and others who had developed a significant relationship with Jim through his work there as associate pastor became a part of the New Life congregation during that period (FR/t/10-4/5; TC/t/10-3/6; GP/t/10-3). Other than that recollection, virtually every interviewee appeared to perceive the personality and leadership behaviors of Jim as the primary catalyst for the turnaround. With perhaps some credit to the LOGOS youth program that was started under a previous pastor, but reinstated under Jim’s leadership, the responses

to that question of precipitants to growth essentially described what was outlined in the last chapter, Jim's personality—a) a people person and b) a detail person—and five intentional behaviors—a) developing a community presence, b) providing quality, meaningful worship, c) educating and equipping members, d) providing a vision for the future, and e) empowering and mobilizing the laity. Though the question was not directly posed as to whether they perceived the turnaround would have occurred without Jim's leadership, the fact that the "events" leading to turnaround were essentially described as outflow of the personality or intentional behaviors of their pastor could logically lead one to assume that members perceived the pastor's role as a catalyst in turnaround as significant and essential.

Research Question 3

The research findings were presented in Chapter IV in such a way as to summarize the major themes that emerged from the various data sources. The data suggested that two essential personal attributes of the pastor contributed significantly to the turnaround at New Life. Jim's strong people skills—which included a welcoming, caring, out-going personality—and his attention to details, driven by a commitment to excellence, played vital roles in changing the personality of the congregation. The pastor, staff, and members suggested that the congregation in many ways had embraced these personality traits of their pastor as part of a congregational identity that was conducive to growth.

Additionally, as the study sought to discern, there were specific leadership behaviors that Jim's exhibited which were vital in bringing revitalization to the congregation. First, his strong involvement in, leadership for, and commitment to the

community were factors that were considered to not only have given him “credibility” with those who were examining the church from the outside, but his community presence was perceived to be a factor in establishing the church as a catalyst for influence beyond their church walls. Second, mentioned as a factor in prompting turnaround as well as a factor in sustaining growth, the commitment to providing quality, meaningful worship was considered to be a central component of the revitalization equation at New Life. The changes that included the blending of contemporary music and media into the services, offering consistent variety, connecting worship experiences to varied preferences, and emphasizing making good first impressions were critical in their transformation.

Third, under Jim’s leadership, New Life grew because of its commitment to educate and equip its members for growth and ministry to others. That commitment took shape in prioritizing youth and children’s ministries, focusing on evangelism, building discipleship and family ministries, and teaching through sermons. Fourth, Jim provided a vision for the future that the congregation’s leaders and membership embraced as their own. This vision became a corporate vision through conscious efforts to build unity, operate in trust, develop and sell the vision, keep that vision viable, and maintain focus around those mutually-embraced goals.

Finally, the interview and other data revealed the strong impact that Jim’s commitment to empower and mobilize the laity had upon the turnaround experience at New Life. Jim and his staff were committed to matching the passions of individuals with a specific need-meeting ministry, to building volunteerism in ministries, to mobilizing the compassion of members into practical missions-ministry, to involving new members in ministry quickly, to elevating qualified individuals to leadership positions within the

congregation, and to sharing responsibility for ministry with other leaders within the body of believers.

Interactions with the Literature

This study of New Life Church revealed consistent themes that existed both in the church and school turnaround lore. These findings propagate the notion that turnaround leaders often bear striking resemblances to one another, exhibiting many of the same personal character traits and intentional behaviors.

Turnaround church literature. Just as the turnaround literature in churches shared common themes, and given that the pastor shared his penchant for being a student of church growth literature, it is not surprising that this turnaround leader would share common attributes and priorities as some of those who have led churches to a similar revitalization experience. For example, Crandall (1995) noted that pastors of small, turnaround churches described themselves as loving and being able to work with people, gifted at the “people skills” with which so many described Jim. The leaders in his study also described themselves as strong teachers and preachers and that their abilities to motivate primarily took form as they articulated the vision for the future they envisioned. Rainer (2001) found that most of those in his study reported returning to and eventually becoming active in a congregation primarily because of the pastor, and specifically the pastor’s ability to preach and teach the Bible in a way that was applicable to their lives. Those participants described the authenticity and conviction of the pastor as compelling and influential in their decision to return. The picture of the personality of the turnaround pastor, as summarized from the literature in Chapter II, is one of with an exceptional work ethic—an optimist with the ability to dream of the future he or she envisions for the

church. This leader, like Jim, is skilled at building and maintaining relationships, loves people, and leads by example. More than just a conscious action, these leaders seemed skilled at the strategic positioning of others and were self-confident enough to share leadership with others who were gifted to help the congregation in that capacity.

Though written almost two decades ago as one of the first books specifically studying those who were successful in leading turnaround, Barna's (1993) summary would almost appear to be an interviewee at New Life when he describes the turnaround pastor as one who emphasizes a) doing things with excellence, b) fostering personal relationships, c) modeling spiritual depth, d) equipping the laity, e) marking worship services with the character of the pastor, f) focusing outward, and g) building the public awareness of the church. Rainer (2001) emphasized the large amount of time that his turnaround pastors spent on sermon preparation and its value in teaching relevant, biblical, and transparent messages. Additionally, he found that turnaround leaders embraced high expectations and commitments to excellence, to small group ministries, and strong youth and children's ministries. Harding's (2007) leadership story shared four common themes with the findings from this study. He saw culturally relevant worship as essential in his turnaround effort, as well as building strong discipleship ministries that grow Bible knowledge. Additionally, he emphasized the importance of sharing ministry with those in the congregation based upon their talents and gifts, and then the responsibility of the pastor and congregation to grow and equip those members to accomplish those ministry tasks.

One can note the summary of behaviors of those turnaround pastors studied in the various works of Chapter II and also note many common themes found with those in this

study. Those pastors, like Jim, were effective at a) developing and selling a vision, b) focusing outward, c) promoting evangelism, d) equipping and mobilizing the laity, e) sharing leadership and developing others, f) propagating high expectations, g) promoting the culture of excellence in the ministries of the church, h) placing emphasis on quality worship, i) preparing diligently for sermons, and j) committing to long-term ministry at a congregation.

Turnaround school literature. As was also noted in Chapter II, though contexts are very different, turnaround pastors seem to bear striking resemblance to turnaround leaders in schools, and the findings of this study promote that assertion. One of the earlier studies outlined in Chapter II, Kirby, Paradise, and King (1992), described their extraordinary leaders as possessing people-orientation, optimism, and unusual levels of commitment. Those leaders had the ability to inspire extra effort from those who followed, to model the character of the organization they desired to develop, to train and develop others, and to develop and sell a vision. Almost two decades later, Leithwood and Strauss (2009) were finding many of those same characteristics and behaviors in the successful turnaround leaders that emerged in schools. They found that effective turnaround leaders must be able to set and sell the direction to which the leader desires to move and to develop those in the organization to accomplish its goals. Effective principals redesigned and redefined the organization to accomplish school goals and to manage the instructional output of the organization. Though the context was very different, Jim's was very active in similar work to change the character and expectations of the membership of New Life Church as well as in guiding the transformation to

quality, meaningful worship services and effective education and equipping ministries within his church.

Principals, as well as church leaders, who were able to lead schools to revitalization were described as possessing a passion for work, quality people skills, sincere empathy, and effective communication skills. They were highly involved in the details of their schools and effectively modeled the character and behaviors they desire to multiply within their schools. The literature also suggests that turnaround leaders in schools engage in many of the same consistent behaviors as do turnaround pastors. Effective principals a) develop and sell a clear vision, b) communicate high expectations, c) emphasize improvement and development, d) communicate consistently in order to build relationships, e) encourage collaboration and innovation, f) position people strategically, and g) empower others to act.

As was noted in Chapter II, the similarities in the personal attributes and intentional behaviors of turnaround principals and turnaround pastors supports the notion that, though applied in notably different contexts, there are components of successful leadership that are applicable cross-contextually. The findings of this study further support this notion, as those who tell the story of the revitalization of New Life Church perceive a pastor that has not only been influenced by successful leadership theory, but has led the transformation of their congregation by applying principles of leadership that have consistently fostered renewed vitality to organizations in which they have been practiced.

Theoretical Implications

This study furthers the notion of Kouzes and Posner (1987) that successful organizations are not anomalies, but rather those organizations have become successful in large part because of the effective application of leadership principles that must be adapted to the context, but are essentially universal in their benefit. Just as the interviewees at New Life seemed most often to begin their story with the character and personality of their pastor, Kouzes and Posner began by encouraging the leader to “model the way.” The researchers understood what most followers understand, but what many leaders do not seem to embrace: It is virtually impossible for a leader to transform an organization into something that he or she is not. The leader must set the example of the values that are desired to be indicative of the organization. After 14 years as their pastor, Jim still describes his priorities of loving, caring for, and meeting the needs of people, and it is probably no accident that congregants now almost universally describe and celebrate their congregation as a loving, caring, need-meeting body of believers.

Jim’s behaviors further advance the assertions that leadership content, regardless of context, has not changed. Kouzes and Posner (1987) emphasize the need for leaders to “inspire a shared vision,” which is accomplished through developing a viable, optimistic picture of what the organization can become and then enlisting others in that vision. In a congregation that had been defined by splits, instability, and discontent, Jim was able to build unity and trust in pursuit of a future very different from the malaise of the previous 20 years. He refused to fall prey to negativity and maintained focus on goals more desirable than where they were.

As was noted in the study of paradigms of successful school leadership, “change” appeared to be an emerging paradigm for aspiring leaders. Yet, over two decades ago—well before the technology revolution of the last decade—Kouzes and Posner (1987) urged leaders to “challenge the process,” to search for opportunities to experiment and take risks, understanding that a new future can only occur through new behaviors. The transformation of worship services at New Life was gradual, but it was certainly significant and substantial. A church where session records indicated a focus inward and on maintenance ministries was transformed into a church committed to mission work beyond themselves and expansion of need-meeting ministries within their church and community. And, to maintain forward motion in the face of sometimes uncomfortable change, the theorists suggested that it was also necessary to “encourage the heart,” to recognize the contributions of others and celebrate the values and victories of the organization. Jim shared that they were “constantly celebrating what the Lord has done...and celebrating and thanking people for what they have done” (JI/t/9-25/25). He understands that part of his leading that must come from the pulpit must be in celebrating and promoting the values that he desires the congregation to embrace, reinforcing commitment through appealing to the basic human motivation to be appreciated by others.

Finally, Kouzes and Posner (1987) understood that an effective leader cannot do things alone, that leader must accomplish things through other people. They encouraged leaders to develop that capacity in others by conscious efforts to “enable others to act.” Organizations need the collective capital of the talents of gifts of their people, who have the freedom to use those talents for innovation and improvement. Jim seemed to

understand that to effectively mobilize people, New Life must make an initial commitment to educating and equipping the members to engage in ministry. Then, he was committed to providing opportunities—and expectations—for members to engage in the work of the church in the areas in which they were gifted or felt impassioned. Volunteerism was high at New Life, primarily because the pastor and session believed, not in starting a ministry and then seeking to find leadership, but rather in starting ministries for which leadership was already present. They were committed to involving new members in the work of the church and had removed barriers that enabled them to move qualified individuals to positions of leadership rather quickly. Additionally, Jim was able to foster a mindset change for the leaders in the congregation themselves. Elders now shared the pastoral responsibilities of the congregation and were charged with oversight of a particular area of ministry within the congregation. The mutual respect of the congregants, the church leaders, and the pastor was evident because there appeared to be a sincere feeling that “We have done this together.”

Implications for Practice

Jim’s incredible giftedness in areas other than those considered part of the regular pastoral duties—such as his abilities to play multiple instruments well, sing beautifully, compose music and educational literature, and design a new construction, among others—coupled with an equally talented wife such as Amy, could lead one reading this study into prescribing further to the charismatic, super-hero leadership mindset, believing that New Life’s story is merely an aberration of the work of an unusual leader. However, one might take note that there were still respondents who, while quite pleased with the overall work of their pastor, felt that his sermons were too long. The researcher observed

a speaker who still primarily preached from a complete—albeit well-prepared—script, who would not be judged a great speaker. There were some who felt that he could be better at delegation, that he could be better at some pastoral responsibilities, and that his preferences in music could be more balanced. He would agree that he was not super-human and that he possessed areas in which he could still grow.

Though certainly it would be hard to imagine anyone being largely successful without some measure of the people skills and caring heart that he possessed, the researcher would assert that it was the intentional actions of developing a community presence; providing quality, meaningful worship; educating and equipping the members; providing a vision for the future; and empowering and mobilizing the laity that lay at the core of his work of revitalization at New Life. Given, a pastor who does not possess the musical talents that Jim does would have an additional burden of locating such a person to make the significant shift that has occurred under his leadership. However, the other factors are very much a product of intentional focus and emphasis within the congregation. Pastors and other leaders may find themselves forced to operate outside of areas for which they are impassioned or particularly gifted, yet that does not mean the leader is not capable of leading successfully in those areas with adequate emphasis and attention to personal and professional growth. The researcher would assert that, although Jim benefited greatly from observing his family in church leadership positions throughout his life, Jim is primarily a gifted musician and worship leader with exceptional skills in the creative arts, who through immense work and desire to serve effectively has learned to operate effectively outside his primary giftedness in the arts of effective leadership and pastoral ministries. Therefore, aspiring turnaround leaders can take heart that much of

what is essential in directing effective revitalization efforts can be learned and practiced successfully if made a priority.

The fundamental beliefs that guided the researcher to an interest in this study were two-fold. First, the researcher believes—even more so after summarizing the data from this study—that people are essentially the same across contexts and that with some exceptions, many of the fundamental practices of successful leaders are applicable cross-contextually. Second, if leaders and their organizations have a sincere desire to experience turnaround, and if matched with appropriate, targeted, sustained action, a church or school could indeed experience revitalization. This is a study that presents some *good news* for many in leadership positions.

Particularly surprising to the researcher throughout his time in the field was that he did not notice a remarkably similar vocabulary from the respondents in oftentimes describing the same concepts. The five behaviors outlined in Chapter IV are stated in terms that were not offered by the interviewees, but rather created in analysis by this researcher. Some current leadership theory and practice suggests a very rigid process of developing vision and mission statements that serve as the rudder of the ship throughout a change process, and that effective leaders should refer to those statements often. However, the consistency with which they were reported confirms the importance of those leadership behaviors in the work of prompting and sustaining turnaround, while not suggesting that they were necessarily etched in respondents' minds because they had been consistently rehearsed before the people in formal statements or through written dogma. In other words, the important point does not appear to be that the vision of the character and values of the organization take form in visible or audible “slogans,” but

rather that they must take life in consistent, sustained action and attention from leadership.

For instance, no one other than Jim mentioned the unusual phenomenon at New Life of moving qualified new members rapidly into positions of leadership; yet it was evident that it was significant, not only in connecting those valuable new people to the life of the church, but also was significant, in my view, in bringing in fresh perspectives that kept the session in touch with the changing congregation and perhaps from becoming enslaved to stale agendas or priorities. I would also suggest that the rotation of new “blood” into leadership aided the session in leading the congregation through difficult periods, such as the dismissal of a staff member. That “sharing of power” opens the door for greater stakeholder input, which in turn builds trust—a key component in building unity around a vision. Though there is certainly nothing wrong with slogans and mantras, many pastors expect the words to shortcut the work of transformation. Leaders can learn that phrases do not speak nearly as loudly as do values that are consistently modeled before their followers.

Two additional complimentary components of turnaround that were evident at New Life are worthy of additional emphasis at this point. First, the immense respect and trust between Jim and the elders—active and inactive—was easily identifiable. Jim and some elders shared that the primary vision and leadership of the church came from the pulpit in the form of their pastor. It was striking that most of the new members did not know who all of the elders were or, for some, even exactly what role the elders played in the leadership of the congregation. However, it was evident that responsibility for the

well-being of the members and stewardship of the future of the congregation was shouldered conscientiously by the elders alongside their pastor.

To reinforce the notion that long-term pastoral commitment is necessary to spur significant growth and change in a congregation, the researcher must note that the first significant move towards shared ministry that could extend beyond the arms of the pastor came in his 5th year when the Rainbow concept of dividing the congregation for pastoral care among the elders was established. It was no small action when church leadership changed its paradigm of pastoral leadership and responsibility for congregational care to the concept of shared shepherding obligation. Though they will readily admit that some are better at fulfilling their duties than others, the researcher did not hear a single comment suggesting a feeling that elders were doing what Jim was being paid to do. As Jim portrayed it, “We have always tried to assume the best intentions” (JI/fn/9-25/3). The elders seem to understand that shared ministry is not a ploy for less work for their pastor, but rather an opportunity to aid him in more focused work that is by-and-large more beneficial to the life of the church.

That trust was most certainly built over time. As was noted, the examination of session records revealed a flurry of activity when Jim first became pastor. Yet, a similar flurry of activity is evident when Jerry became pastor. Why was one accepted and the other a source of division? This researcher believes that it began in the embodiment of the values that Jim promoted, as well as his embrace of ideas like youth, education, and facilities that were already accepted priorities of the group. Jerry’s primary error, however, may have been in simply moving too fast on major changes for which his perspective and credibility had not yet been established. Within 4 months of Jerry’s

arrival, session records reflect that he was teaching about “The Duties of Elders” in the session meetings and 4 months’ later began another program through the presbytery of elder training. While those actions may have been somewhat justified, when coupled with a request a few months later to have paid time off each month for Army Reserve duty, one could easily see how elders might feel as if their pastor was trying to unload responsibilities on them. Jim’s transformation to shared pastoral responsibilities was certainly no less dramatic or intrusive upon the lives of elders, yet the move was accepted after 5 years of “trust-building” with his session members. The worship style from piano, organ, formal choir, and traditional music to the contemporary blended style with multiple instruments and a much different type of contemporary music was a huge shift. But, it was a shift that came gradually over the course of 9 years, in bite-sized portions that the congregation and its leaders could handle. Wisdom in managing change is essential for leaders to build the trust capital necessary for large-scale changes that must inevitably come in churches in need of turnaround.

Secondly, trust in the pastor must be matched by the pastor’s trust in the people. As alluded to briefly when discussing the large numbers of ministers who find their home at New Life, the self-confidence that Jim exhibits as a leader was a crucial factor in his ability to trust the people with the work of the church. Insecure leaders struggle with relinquishing control of major responsibilities because someone’s success might weaken his or her status as *the* leader. Yet, Jim was a great example of one who was not threatened by surrounding himself with those who had significant skills and capacity to expand the ministries of the church, perhaps beyond what Jim was capable. Jim and his staff were committed to allowing ideas to originate and take form at the initiation of

members and saw themselves as facilitators for the work that others might accomplish. Former pastors could fill the pulpit without Jim worrying whether others enjoyed others' messages more, but rather he welcomed the opportunities as times for rest, refreshing, and re-allocation of energies to other tasks. Self-confidence is a product of trust as well—trust from the leader of the intentions of those who are serving, trust that others are not operating with hidden agendas to undermine his or her leadership position. Environments of trust produce fertile soil for revitalization.

Implications for Research

While the studies of large groups of churches like Crandall's (1995) work with 100 small membership turnaround churches and Stetzer and Dodson's (2007) summation of findings from 324 "comeback churches" are valuable in painting broader pictures of themes which are in operation across large numbers of churches, the very size of these studies have somewhat necessitated that researchers take a more quantitative approach to gather such immense amounts of data. The pity of such is that these researchers are rarely able to delve into the deeper, more personal perceptions that are most often more available in the rich, thick descriptions of qualitative studies. Church leaders gain rich insight into the broader categories of actions that surface in the large studies and that even served to organize Chapter IV in this study. However, pastors also gain rich, personally applicable insights when the details of the "rubber hitting the road" are able to be fleshed out in the descriptions of specific actions and initiatives of turnaround pastors. The limitation of such qualitative inquiries is obviously the lack of generalizability of those findings beyond a limited context. The relatively recent abundance of qualitative works would provide an opportunity for future researchers to do meta-analysis studies of

these qualitative works that could begin to find more common themes and work to “universalize” some of the terminology that is evolving in the relatively new academic discipline.

Further, this researcher essentially kept to the focus of the interview protocol, and though noting some critical events as perceived by the researcher—such as the large offering to missions in the middle of the budget crunch of building a new facility—as they fit into the life of the congregation over this period, many of such events were never mentioned by a single respondent. The researcher noted that a long-time staff member had been dismissed in 2005, an event that could have significantly affected the forward momentum of the congregation. Yet, not a single person mentioned it as an issue in this period of growth, and it appeared as if the congregation had not endured any significant damage as a result of this action. Though not included in this report, the researcher asked Jim and Frank about the incident, thinking it was significant that the leadership was so successful in keeping this situation from affecting the church negatively. Additional research into how successful leaders managed such conflicts and potential stumbling blocks that *could have* sidetracked the turnaround process could be a source of immense help to those who might be facing those critical junctures in the future.

As this was a study aiming to inform those desiring to lead revitalization efforts in rural congregations, this researcher discovered that relatively few works have focused on the rural church. Crandall’s (1995) work and subsequent follow-up (2008) were the only large studies that this researcher located that specifically targeted turnaround in the rural context. Ruffcorn’s (1994) work was primarily theoretical, but it did attempt to address the unique dynamics of trying to grow churches in sparse and sometimes declining

populations. Educational studies specifically examining turnaround in rural settings are equally as sparse. As was stated in the first chapter of this document, the highly mobile nature of our society and the immense connectionalism that occurs because of readily available technology has made many areas considered “isolated” certainly less so than they were even two decades ago. The fundamental question that denominations face is whether these small, rural churches can be revitalized and if so, how. If they are sincere in a desire to find ways to breathe new life into these congregations, more studies specifically targeting rural churches and rural schools—where very little changes rapidly, where populations are essentially static, and where financial or geographical limitations prohibit access to myriad choices—are needed.

The vast majority of turnaround studies have rightly focused on the behaviors of those who have led the renewal efforts; however, a relative few have focused much attention on the process by which the pastor and congregation, or the school and principal, have “found each other.” Many practitioners would certainly benefit from research which sought to discover how leaders landed in the fields that they eventually found fertile for growth. Many would benefit from insight on ways turnaround leaders found matches for their talents, passions, and vision in a specific congregation or school in a sea of failing options. Additionally, those within those congregations or school systems who are searching for a leader might gain from the study of other church and school leaders who were active, and successful, in the selection process. This became increasingly plain to the researcher, not only as he has continued his work as interim pastor for two different congregations seeking a pastor during the course of work towards and during this study, but also in that Jim accepted the call to another church and

announced his departure on the last day of the researcher's presence on site. The elders at New Life have contacted the researcher on more than one occasion seeking to learn more of the conclusions of this study as well as help in finding a successor to their outstanding pastor. Further research into processes of matching pastors with churches and principals with schools could be valuable information for each of those groups.

Finally, in Crandall's (2008) follow-up study of the 100 churches he had studied 13 years prior, he found that only four had grown significantly during that period, and that three-fourths of those contacted had entered another season of decline or conflict since his initial study, and several had even closed their doors since the original study. His primary question is one that New Life is facing at this juncture and is one that many churches and schools continue to face and bears the need for additional research: "How does any organization best maintain its momentum when a transformation leader moves on" (p. 131)? Researchers could find valuable focus in those churches who have maintained their forward progress through multiple leaders, especially examining the role of the outgoing pastor or principal in preparing the organization for the transition and life after he or she leaves and ways in which the outgoing leader may aid the incoming leader in maintaining the momentum of the organization or in training someone from within to serve as the replacement for the leader. A follow-up study of this congregation in 5 years could provide valuable insight into this congregation's ability or inability to maintain their incredible turnaround story.

Limitations

As with any study, this research offers only a small glimpse into a larger picture of turnaround that occurs in rural churches. As this study was completed in partial

fulfillment of the requirements for a doctoral degree and was not conducted in conjunction with other researchers, it suffers from a single researcher bias, both in pre-conceived assumptions as a trained and experienced pastor of what is proper and effective, and in perspective as a single set of eyes trying to capture a photograph of a phenomenon that is fully incapable of being contained within the pages of such a study.

Further, a characteristic of a rural setting is its tight-knit, sometimes closed community that is often uncomfortable with an outsider full of questions. The researcher understands that an abbreviated on-site period may have prohibited the building of significant relationships that opens the door for honest reflection and sharing which might have occurred with a much longer immersion into the life of the congregation. Small towns do not often provide the luxury of anonymity, and many interviewees may have been reluctant to share freely for fear that they might be viewed unfavorably, or equally disturbing in a church-setting, as judgmental and un-Christian, even though the researcher assured the interviewees that pseudonyms would be used in the final report.

As was noted earlier in this chapter, because this study was conducted 14 years after Jim began his work in this congregation and 11 years after the initial, significant growth began in 1999, many of the respondents appeared to have difficulty recalling the events that were a part of the initial work of turnaround. Perhaps had those members had the opportunities to examine session records as the researcher did or to re-live history chronologically through church newsletters and other publications, members might have been able to recall more vividly specific events that played a large role in propagating turnaround. Studies focused on turnaround might discover more specific data if they are conducted closer to the period in which the event occurred.

As this study was conducted in a single church, and understanding that no two churches are exactly alike, the researcher understands that some strategies employed to exact turnaround in this church may be entirely only contextually valuable and may not be generalizable to other settings. Even though rural areas have many characteristics in common, each one also has its unique personality and set of circumstances that have formed its culture. Additionally, the dynamics that occurred within this small town setting would also likely differ greatly from the experience of one trying to lead turnaround in a urban environment, in an environment outside of the Bible Belt, or in an environment where demographic dynamics have changed dramatically over a period of time.

Likewise, the choice of a single, small denomination as the research base for congregations that met the turnaround criteria may make some findings relevant only within that particular body of believers. That so few churches met the turnaround criteria within this denomination provided very little opportunity to compare leaders in similar settings who have achieved similar results or to study community effects on similar congregations.

Summary

The story of turnaround leadership at New Life is one of hope and worthy of celebration. It is a story that lends credence to the claims of existing leadership theory, and it supports the notion that many aspects of leadership are applicable cross-contextually. It is encouraging that many scholars and practitioners are embracing that notion and are engaging in regular discussion towards more effective leadership that is changing the futures of once struggling churches and schools. Though academic

institutions and seminaries are often slow to embrace the changing needs of leaders today, the relative glut of information that is available through print and electronic media is reducing isolation and providing more opportunities for pastors and principals to find the guidance they need. Though many embraced the notion that secular leadership theory and research could inform pastoral leadership, there was a relatively small amount of help from church-specific literature. A relatively few works based on actual case studies and research in churches that were available when the literature for this study began several years ago has blossomed to a rapidly expanding body of information that again confirms the notion that turnaround can occur in the presence of appropriate and effective leadership.

Certainly there will always be different skills that are necessary for successful leadership in specific contexts, but this study supports the ideas set forward by Kouzes and Posner (1987) and other theorists that the fundamental components of leadership are the same across contexts. That is because the primary interplay in leadership will always be about people. New Life interviewees almost universally began by talking about the way that Jim made them feel. They spoke of his out-going personality, his caring, and his welcoming nature. He was about people. And, his behaviors were about people. Developing a community presence was about credibility with people. Providing quality, meaningful worship was about connecting with people. Educating and equipping the members was about growing people. Providing a vision was about rallying people. And, empowering and mobilizing the laity was about trusting and working through people to accomplish a greater, common purpose.

Leaders are not leaders until they have followers. Followers do not follow until they are mobilized by persons in positions of leadership who can connect to the fundamental motivations and aspirations of the people in their care. Failing schools and dying churches are plenteous; leaders who have been successful at enlisting followers and changing those blights are not. The turnaround literature and the findings of this study suggest, however, that death for churches and schools is not certain, but rather that turnaround is reproducible and that *new life* is attainable for more than just one struggling church in south central Kentucky.

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APPENDIX A

		Sunday School	Professions	Membership
<u>Year</u>	<u>Active Members</u>	<u>Enrollment</u>	<u>of Faith</u>	<u>Gains</u>
1993	140	123	8	20
1994	142	117	2	3
1995	147	117	5	5
1996	118	83	2	3
1997	118	99	6	11
1998	122	100	6	9
1999	164	122	16	41
2000	185	141	16	20
2001	204	174	9	19
2002	220	180	5	24
2003	226	168	2	10
2004	257	215	8	31
2005	274	182	10	19
2006	290	216	13	20
2007	310	245	14	31
2008	320	260	3	10
2009	360	270	22	23
Totals			147	299

CURRICULUM VITAE

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