

ABSTRACT

CAN THEY LIVE AGAIN? AN ANALYSIS OF SMALL CHURCHES WITHIN THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE WHO TRANSITIONED TO VITALITY FROM THE DEATH SPIRAL

by

Arthur T. Roxby, III

Many small churches in America exist in a constant state of plateau or decline. These small-membership churches comprise a majority of the churches in the United States. On any given Sunday a significant number of Christians who gather together to worship do so in a small-membership church. These churches have significant strengths. Further, biblically and historically the small church has been the expression of the body of Christ in the world. In a day and age where consumerism reigns and bigger is viewed as better, the megachurch model has captivated the imagination of the world and many denominational leaders. In this context many view the small church as an anachronism whose time has passed.

The fact is many small churches in existence not only survive, they thrive. Small churches that have been stalled or declining have accomplished transition to renewed vitality. These congregations disciple their members. The leaders of these congregations equip, empower, and release their members to do ministry in their communities. They understand that their calling in the world is to be faithful to the Great Commandment and to live out the Great Commission. Week in and week out those who gather to worship in these churches experience the voice of God speaking in their midst, changing lives.

The purpose of this research was to understand the transition process experienced

by small Nazarene churches. This purpose has been accomplished through a detailed questionnaire that explored the components of renewal experienced by these congregations. To understand the transition process, I conducted semi-guided on-site interviews at six churches that have experienced this transition.

This research discovered that renewed congregations exhibited significant corporate and conceptual renewal. The renewed churches experienced corporate renewal in terms of renewed spiritual and relational vitality. The churches experienced conceptual renewal by confronting the brutal reality of their need for significant change and a renewed outward focus that seeks to touch the world with the gospel message. Further, the research discovered that the relationship between pastor and congregation plays a significant role in the renewal process. That relationship is best described as a synergism between pastor and parishioner with the pastor leading the congregation forward. The renewal is illustrated by the congregation's faithfulness in living out the biblical mandate to make disciples in the world.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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by
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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM

Throughout the first seventeen years of my pastoral ministry, I have had the privilege of pastoring four churches. The first of these churches was Millcreek Church of the Nazarene in Erie, Pennsylvania. This church averaged eighteen in morning worship attendance when I began my tenure as pastor. The second of these churches was New Hope Community Church in Berwick, Maine. This church claimed thirty-five worshippers on an average Sunday morning when I arrived to serve as pastor in 1993. The third church was Millinocket Church of the Nazarene in Millinocket, Maine. This church had experienced seven years of decline in worship attendance. The church had declined from a peak average Sunday morning worship attendance of 187 in 1991 to fifty-seven worshippers upon my arrival as pastor in 1999. I currently serve as lead pastor in my fourth church, Ryot Church of the Nazarene in Alum Bank, Pennsylvania. This church's average Sunday morning worship attendance had declined from 135 attendees to ninety-five upon my arrival in 2003.

A significant portion of my pastoral ministry has occurred in regions that have experienced the economic and social downturn ravaging the northeastern United States at large. As such, these towns have seen their economic base eroded and the positive outlook that characterizes growing and stable communities faded away. Often the "best and brightest" in these towns leave the area to pursue more secure jobs and economies. The young of the community grow up, go to college, but rarely return as a productive member of the society. The deep pessimism of impending death permeates the culture of those left behind in these communities.

Prior to the economic downturn of the 1980s, the paper industry brought good jobs and the attendant benefits to the north-central town of Millinocket, Maine. Similarly, the south-central Pennsylvania town of Ryot grew and thrived with the agricultural and manufacturing industries for a substantial portion of the twentieth century. Both of these areas experienced the desperation of the declining economy in the United States at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century.

In Millinocket, the systematic downsizing and ultimate closure of the town's largest employer, a paper mill, devastated the town. Since 1990, Millinocket's population has decreased by 25 percent ("Millinocket"). As the population of the town declined in the wake of the mill closure, so, too, did the ministry of the Church of the Nazarene.

Northwestern Bedford County, Pennsylvania, is a rural farming community interspersed with huge orchards. Key manufacturing industries such as JLG Enterprises, Sterrett/Exact Level, Inc., Creative Pultrusions, and Hedstrom Toys located their operations and headquarters in this rural community. The farming community has been in decline for years. Accordingly, small farms have given way to huge corporate farms or simply have given up farming for profit. The area is strewn with the overgrown remains of these formerly booming farms and homesteads, although many of the area's orchards continue to provide a small number of year-round jobs and add to the tourism industry in the county in season.

JLG, Sterrett, and Hedstrom all left Bedford County, thereby furloughing hundreds of residents out of work. Cannondale Bicycles and Rockland Manufacturing have cut hundreds of jobs during downsizing initiatives. This job loss resulted in the migration of many of the young people from Bedford County. Many teenagers graduate

from high school then go away to college and never return to the area. The Ryot Church of the Nazarene ministers in this setting of economic challenge and decline.

Previously strong sources for supplying ministries with funding and staffing disappeared and both human resources and financial resources are and have become strained. While each church's leadership has demonstrated commitment and desire to become a *great* church, the recent trend seems to work against such a possibility. Both the Millinocket and Ryot churches have found themselves in the midst of significant cultural and societal change.

At one time, the church at Millinocket outgrew its small church designation; nonetheless, the economic and community events of the 1990s have brought this congregation firmly back into its previous small-church status. In 1998, Ryot seemed destined to grow from a small church into a mid-sized church, but the circumstances that developed from 1999 through 2008 caused the church to regress back to its previous status as a small church.

Currently, church culture seems to trumpet the growth of large and megachurches. Much of the literature and programming from denominational headquarters both in the Church of the Nazarene and other denominations seem to present small churches only with programs to develop into the next megachurch. The scale used to evaluate success and/or failure of the church chiefly concerns the number of people worshipping at that location on any given weekend and how many dollars those worshippers have raised during the past year.

Grow Magazine, the flagship magazine of the Church of the Nazarene's US/Canada Missions and Evangelism Department, describes itself in its masthead as a

“journal for the development of Missional leaders and Missional churches”(Grow Magazine). The magazine consistently portrays the successful church as achieving and showing fantastic numerical growth as the paradigm for all small churches. Accordingly, *Grow Magazine* asserts that a successful, great church is one that grows to the next size category.

Each year pastors of these small congregations in the Church of the Nazarene compile their annual reports and send them to their district offices. The district secretary compiles these reports into an overall statistical report available to every delegate of the district. Careful reading of these statistical reports do not support the claims most pastors make when asked, “How has it gone this year?” The usual statement, “Great! God is doing great things at [XYZ] First Church,” makes little sense in light of the numerical measurements.

When measured against the numerical standard of the large or megachurch, these small churches always come up short. Small churches, which account for 70 percent of all congregations, live in the shadow of the large member churches. The leaders and members of small member churches spend considerable time and effort attempting to become a significant church one day.

Small churches will continue to exist; they have survived as small churches for many decades. Many small membership churches have an overwhelming determination to survive and thrive. In the midst of a church culture where many denominational leaders believe them to be insignificant, many of these small churches themselves fail to grasp the true importance of their ministry for the wider church and community. For example, Ryot Church of the Nazarene began in 1938. For most of its sixty-eight years,

the church's Sunday morning service has averaged less than one-hundred attendees. Despite its size, this small church has seen one of its members become first a college professor, then a professor of Old Testament literature at Nazarene Theological Seminary. One of the attendees of Ryot Church went to Nazarene Bible College, entered full-time Christian service, and now pastors in another district. At least one dozen teenagers from the church have left Bedford County and the Ryot Church, yet they are actively involved in their new local congregations and provide valuable ministries for the kingdom of God. Ryot Church of the Nazarene remains a small church, but its legacy extends far beyond its community influence. Such a story raises the question, "Is this an insignificant church?" Many small churches struggle with issues related to their own significance instead of celebrating their unique heritage in the kingdom of God.

Despite the richness of many small churches, many more of these churches struggle to remain open. Oftentimes small churches reflect a survivalist mentality, which seeks only to meet the needs of current members rather than striving to live out their potential for cooperating with the movement of God in their community and context. The task of meeting operating expenses, ministry expenses, and the personnel expenses drain already limited resources. Staffing a few basic ministry opportunities occupies the time and talent of already overextended membership. When small churches do exhibit a desire to grow and become vital, limited resources force them to struggle to achieve the image of vitality thrust upon them by those who see numerical growth as the key measures of success. Small churches desire to be strong, yet they are given a definition of strength that they can rarely achieve. The small church often languishes in the idealistic image of the large church, striving to become the next megachurch in the community when it has

the God-given grace to be his agent of kingdom building in its immediate setting.

Understanding the Problem

In *his book*, James Collins comments on the difficulty of good organizations realizing true greatness:

Good is the enemy of great. And that is one of the key reasons why we have so little that becomes great. The vast majority of companies never become great, precisely because the vast majority become quite good—and that is their main problem. (1)

Goodness can serve to limit the vitality of the small church. Many churches are good.

Small churches thrive in fellowship, personal ministry, and in worship, which meets the needs of the members who attend there, yet this goodness often causes the members of the small church to become content with past accomplishments and a relative state of health. Instead of becoming a truly great church, which lives out the destiny for which Jesus called out that congregation, it exists at a level of complacent goodness.

In the course of his research, Collins reviewed the records of all of the current Fortune 500 companies. In Collins' estimation, only eleven of these companies have transitioned from a good company to becoming a truly great company. This transition involves significant self-awareness, years of determination and hard work, and a single-minded commitment to being the best corporation possible. The many corporations which do not pay the significant price of excellence are content to exist as merely a good company and thus live out the purpose of surviving the many challenges of living in this competitive business world.

Thom S. Rainer asserts, “[I]t is a sin to be good if God has called you to be great” (15). He then goes on to identify the problem of these churches:

With most of these churches, somewhere in their histories they have become satisfied with the status quo. They resist change and often seek to minister only to those inside the church. They have some or many programs. They may even have large budgets. But they are not making a significant impact on their communities. (23)

Rainer then surveys what he identifies as the thirteen breakout churches identified from his research. These breakout churches exhibit the characteristics of great churches.

Rainer's and Collins' works prove a challenge to contemporary church culture. Many congregations in the Church of the Nazarene seem to exist merely to survive rather than to become a tool that God uses to transform society. These congregations become fixated on performing the routine functions of the church so that they may continue to exist at their current state. These congregations often seek to recreate the church as it was in the past.

A significant number of small churches never aspire to become a truly great. Small churches, burdened by the challenge of existing as small churches in a megachurch world, often develop an inferiority complex because they believe that they are simply not important in kingdom terms. Carl Dudley observes this phenomena when he states, "They are short on resources, down on themselves and invisible to most church members" (*Unique Dynamics* 3). This inferiority complex coupled with the many challenges that a small church faces can lead to a corporate attitude within the congregation that anything is acceptable in church life. Excellence in life, in ministry, and in worship is relegated to the realm of the large church and its vast resources. Many small churches live only in the realm of the persistently adequate and never achieve the level of greatness and excellence that God dreams for them. Paul O. Madsen restates the psychological problem that small churches face:

Smallness can become a severe psychological handicap when the assumption is made that physical growth and bigness are the correct goals. If the denomination orients itself to such a concept and lets this attitude permeate all of its literature, teaching materials, program and promotional aids, then a small church is under an almost impossible burden. (32)

This culture breeds a high level of frustration for the pastors given charge over these churches as well as their lay leadership. Pastors then move to other churches and leave lay leaders to struggle with a permeating culture of mediocrity for the congregation.

A cultural emphasis on bigger being better among denominational leaders devalues the contributions of small churches by raising the stature of churches with large weekend worship attendance figures and even larger weekly collections. Illustrative of this problem is Rainer's underlying conclusion (whether unintentional or otherwise) that a great church is one that exhibits huge growth. A review of the churches studied in that work show that all but one of those churches were medium to large prior to their breakout point. Further, all of the identified churches averaged more than seven hundred attendees during a weekend. This underlying assumption served as part of the impetus for this research.

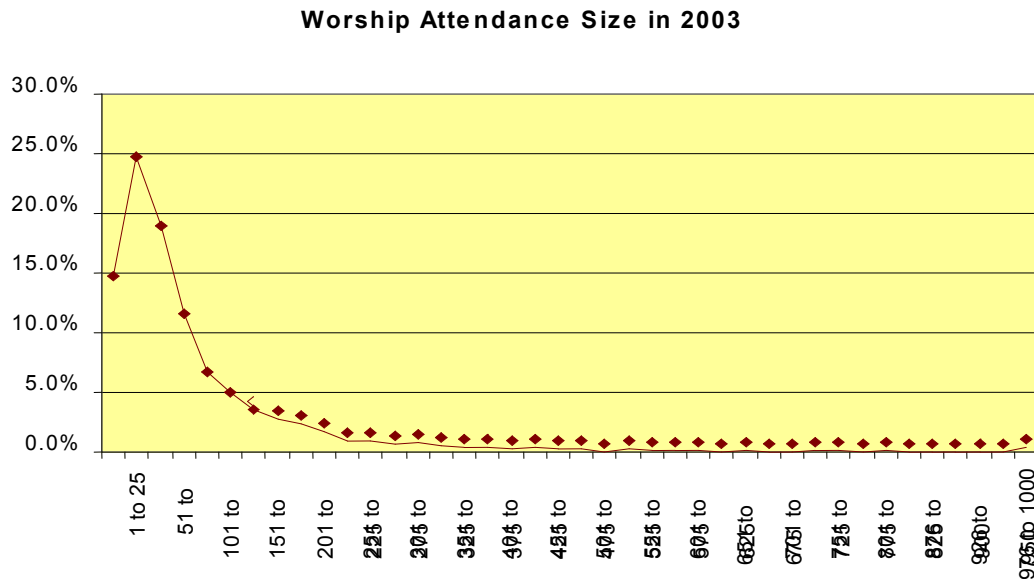
A significant number of churches in the United States qualify as small churches. In his work, William M. Easum says, "This study is for churches with [a] worship average of seventy-five or less. This size church accounts for approximately 70 percent of all the churches in North America" (5). Kenneth O. Gangel defines the small church:

Sixty percent of all Protestant churches in the United States and Canada have fewer than 200 members each. Two-thirds of these [churches] average less than 120 in a Sunday morning worship service. At least one-half of all Protestant Churches in America can be labeled small. (55)

Small churches are the majority of the congregations in North America today. As such they play a significant role in the life of the Church and should be valued as a significant

part of God’s ultimate plan.

The Church of the Nazarene is a denomination populated by small churches. Research by Kenneth Crow reveals the breakdown of congregational size in the Church of the Nazarene in 2003 see Figure 1.1(Crow 5). Richard Houseal confirms Crow’s research confirms that 73% of all churches of the Nazarene average less than 100 in morning worship attendance and thus are categorized as small churches (Houseal).



Source: Crow 5.

Figure 1.1. Sunday morning worship average in 2003.

The Maine and Mid-Atlantic districts in which I most recently served illustrate the prevalence of small churches in the Church of the Nazarene. The sheer number of small churches in the Church of the Nazarene reveals how significant the issue of small church vitality is for the denomination. Table 1.1 represents the breakdown of the various

congregations of the Mid-Atlantic District.

Table 1.1. 2005 Church Size Breakdown Mid-Atlantic District Church of the Nazarene

Size Category	Number of Churches
0-100	69
101-150	9
151-250	9
251+	7
Total Active Churches	107

Source: “Forty-Eighth & Ninety-Eighth Annual Assembly Journal” 126-30.

Table 1.1 shows that 64.4 percent of the churches in the Mid-Atlantic District fall into the small church category. This categorization is slightly lower than the national average of 70.9 percent for the Church of the Nazarene in the United States. Table 1.2 shows the breakdown for the Church of the Nazarene in the United States for the same time period.

Table 1.2. 2005 Church Size Breakdown Church of the Nazarene in the United States

Size Category	Number of Churches
0-100	3628
100-249	1,075
250-500	295
500 +	114
Total Active Churches	5112

Source: Kenneth R. Crow and Dale E. Jones 51.

A significant issue with which I have dealt over the years of my ministry is how small churches that are characterized by plateau or decline become vital churches that are used by God to transform lives and communities. The leadership of the three districts where I have pastored has generally wrestled with the same problem. Throughout these same years of ministry, the denominational leadership of the Church of the Nazarene has attempted to resolve the issue as well. All too often, the unfortunate solution asserts that small churches must become large churches to be in order to be considered significant, strong, or healthy.

The small church is one of the ordinary vehicles God uses to change the lives of both believers and nonbelievers in the world today. Kennon L. Callahan affirms that the vital small church will continue to change the lives of non believers in the community where they minister when he says, “More people will be drawn to small, strong congregations than any other kind of congregation”(*Small Strong Congregations* 12-13).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to identify transition characteristics of vital small Nazarene churches.

Research Questions

My research investigated three primary research questions.

Research Question #1

What are the transition characteristics of the identified churches?

Research Question #2

What is the significance and role of the pastoral leadership in the transition?

Research Question #3

What are the elements operative behind the identified churches' transition to vitality?

Definitions

To understand more fully the transition experienced by small churches that have transitioned to renewed vitality, three terms must be clearly defined. These three terms are small church, vitality, and transition.

Small Church

For purposes of this research, a small church is defined as a church whose average morning worship attendance was less than one-hundred persons prior to its transition point. This definition point follows the consensus of literature related to small churches. Churches which move beyond one-hundred worshipers tend to exhibit procedural and organizational development that differs from the small church.

Vitality

The vitality of great small churches must be defined for the purposes of this study. I have attempted to avoid some popular terminology of defining small churches as healthy, growing, or vibrant, because of the intellectual and philosophical baggage associated with these terms. In defining a small church as a vital small church, I refer to churches that are actively and intentionally pursuing the mission of the gospel of Jesus Christ to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all that he has taught (Matt. 28:20). This vitality results in believers coming to faith and being intentionally disciplined, involved in the ministry of the local church, and the focus on the community as being the primary place for that ministry to occur.

I chose to use the term vitality over the other terms, such as church health and church growth, because of the preconceived notions associated with those terms. Further, the term vitality connotes life. Many of the other terms associated with vital churches do not necessarily point to life. A church can grow and be neither healthy nor vital. A church can exhibit a relatively high level of health and still not be a vital, living organism. A vital congregation is one that is living out the biblical purpose for the existence of the church.

Transition

A third term germane to this study is the transition that has occurred or is occurring in vital small churches. For example, many churches will achieve significant growth points in their collective congregational life. A particularly dynamic leader or vision may catalyze growth. When that leader leaves, growth goes with him or her. Vital congregations experience a cultural transition that transcends any pastor's or leader's talents or personality. That transition results in a congregational culture that evaluates missional effectiveness and exhibits an unwillingness to return to the old habits and practices.

This *transition point* denotes the period of time when the congregation moved beyond plateau or decline to vitality. This point comes when the church regularly sees new believers won to the kingdom who are intentionally disciplined in their walk with Christ and who are then involved in a regular ministry according to their spiritual gifts. Significant involvement of the church in ministry in the community in which it exists indicates the beginning of this transition point. The ministry is intentional and seeks to bring non-Christians into contact with Jesus Christ. The transition point necessarily yields

results that last several years in order to be considered as a valid transition.

Ministry Intervention

This research studied the characteristics of small churches that exhibited a transition to vitality. Each of the six identified churches experienced defining moments that catalyzed a varied and often painful transition to renewed vitality. The focus of this project was to understand the characteristics of the transformation common to each of these churches.

Prior to this transition, these churches were stalled or declining. To understand this transition, I created a survey that measured the relative vitality of the congregation in six key areas of renewal: spiritual renewal, relational renewal, structural renewal, missional renewal, conceptual renewal, and corporate renewal.

Following the completion of the surveys, I visited each congregation and conducted two semi-guided interviews. The first interview was with the pastoral leadership of the congregation. The second interview was with the official and unofficial lay leadership of the congregation. I constructed these interviews to be semi-guided in nature and followed a strict scripting to guarantee that the interview would be reproducible in any context. The purpose of the interview was to discern the process of change that the congregation experienced.

I organized the interview questions into six categories. These categories were the congregational atmosphere prior to the transition, the atmosphere during and after the transition, the significant differences in the congregation after the transition, a description of the transition process, the pastor's role in the transition process, and the leader's role in the transition process.

Each church experienced a different intervention that catalyzed the renewal of that congregation. Owings Mills First Latino changed the physical location of their church from Brooklyn, Maryland, to Owings Mills. Fawn Grove changed pastors just prior to their transition. Lakeside, Stratton, and East Palestine each came to the stark realization that they must change how they thought, worshipped, and evangelized their respective communities or they would die. Media exhibited a dogged determination to thrive again. Four key laypeople attended, at their own expense, the Philadelphia District's New Church University and learned some of the aspects of their congregational life that they needed to transform. Three months later, they called a new pastor who, in turn, amplified the catalyst that was already present.

Context of Study

The Church of the Nazarene is a Wesleyan-Arminian denomination that arose from the American Holiness Revival of the nineteenth century. The denomination currently claims more than 1.5 million members worshipping in over fourteen-thousand congregations in 154 world areas. Generally, the church espouses conservative theological beliefs with a strong emphasis on heart holiness engendered by a second definite work of grace known as entire sanctification. Worship within the denomination ranges from free to liturgical and from traditional to contemporary. In the United States, the vast majority of the churches are currently experiencing plateau or decline.

This study took place within a selected grouping of small Nazarene churches within a two-hundred-mile radius of my home. This circle contains a variety of socioeconomic conditions as well as several different cultural milieus. Included within this radius are major metropolitan areas such as Pittsburgh and Philadelphia,

Pennsylvania; Baltimore, Maryland; Washington D. C.; and, Columbus, Ohio. This area also included much of rural Pennsylvania, Maryland, and West Virginia. As such, the churches across this region have the potential to minister to virtually every socioeconomic and ethnic grouping represented in American society.

Methodology

This qualitative research study occurred at multiple sites using researcher-designed questionnaires and on-site interviews in order to assess the processes and procedures that each church followed in order to accomplish its respective transition. I evaluated results from interviews and questionnaires, looking for commonalities linking the transition of each church. Further, I evaluated these commonalities for universal applicability. The results from that survey were added to the data analyzed by the Research Reflection Team. The Research Reflection Team included five members from my local church and two fellow pastors.

Participants

The subjects of this study were small Nazarene churches within a two-hundred-mile radius of Alum Bank, Pennsylvania. Further, subject churches had accomplished long-term transition from decline or plateau to a state of strength or vitality. I invited each identified church to participate in a diagnostic process to understand the dynamics and principles of their church's unique transformation. Within each congregation, the pastor, current church leaders, and key leaders who have attended that local church for a significant period of time were invited to complete questionnaires and be interviewed for the purposes of this study.

In order to identify the churches that have accomplished the transition that is the

focus of this study, I sent a letter to each district superintendent of the several districts located within the two-hundred-mile radius. These districts included Upstate New York, Metro New York, Philadelphia, Mid-Atlantic, Virginia, Pittsburgh, West Virginia North, West Virginia South, East Ohio, and Central Ohio. I asked the district superintendents to identify vital small churches in their districts as well as small churches that had successfully transitioned from plateau or decline to a position of strength or vitality.

I identified churches for study that had previously existed in a state of plateau or decline. Further, the district superintendents referred to me churches that had experienced a transition to vitality for a period of at least twelve months, and this transition to vitality continued into the present moment. This renewed vitality was illustrated by new believers finding faith in Jesus Christ, those believers growing in and through intentional discipleship making activities. I defined further marks of renewed vitality as an intentional outward focus that sought to engage the community and meet its needs, a high degree of relational unity within the congregation, and the experience of passionate worship that was designed to be culturally relevant. The scriptural definition of the renewed congregation was a church that is actively and intentionally pursuing the mission of Christ to make disciples of all nations.

Instrumentation

A researcher-designed questionnaire was developed to measure the relative vitality of the congregation. I sent this questionnaire to each church in advance of the interview process with a self-addressed stamped envelope to return the completed surveys. I then submitted the surveys to Dr. Lance Revenaugh and Dr. Laxman Hegede of Frostburg State University for statistical analysis and tabulation.

A researcher-led, semi-guided interview was conducted at each site. As such, I began these interviews with a possible slate of questions designed to identify how each congregation successfully transitioned to a position of strength. From the baseline questions, I followed the self-understanding of each group as they discussed their history, the revelatory moments, and the strategies that they used and identified to accomplish the transition. I compared results and notes from each interview, identifying commonalities among the churches.

Data Collection

To begin the study, I sent a letter explaining the purpose and scope of the study to the district superintendent of each district within the study area. This letter asked the superintendent to identify the vital small churches in his or her district. I followed the letter with a telephone call if no written response was given. Following the identification of a pool of vital small churches, I contacted the pastor of each of the identified churches with a letter explaining the purpose and scope of the study. This letter sought permission to study the church and its transition.

After the pastor of the identified church granted permission to participate in my study, I sent the initial surveys to the church. The pastor, the church board, and any significant leaders who were present and active during the significant times of change for the congregation completed these surveys. I asked each pastor to return the completed surveys to me via the postage-paid envelope included in the packet.

Upon receipt and review of the completed questionnaires, I contacted the pastor in order to schedule a time for a personal interview. During this face-to-face meeting time, I spent time with the pastor, with the church board, and with identified significant

congregation members. These interviews provided me with an understanding of the congregation's history, the dynamics that were in operation prior to, during, and after the transition point. Further, I gained a greater understanding of the church's self-awareness of the process involved in becoming a vital small church.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data generated by this research fell into two categories. Dr. Revenaugh and Dr. Hegde compiled the returned surveys using Minitab and SAS to analyze the responses. Dr. Hegde subjected the responses to cluster analysis, discriminate analysis, correlation analysis, and variable factor analysis to identify response patterns.

I distributed the transcripts of the interviews to my Research Reflection Team. That team consisted of four laypeople and three clergy. One of the pastors and one of the lay members have earned master's degrees. One member of the team completed some college. The others have graduated from high school and are employed in several fields. One member is a homemaker who is studying for a ministry credential, one member owns his own heating and air conditioning business, one member is a high school technical education teacher, and one member is employed by Pennsylvania Career Link. I gave attention to the demographic of the Research Reflection Team to ensure against educational bias.

The Research Reflection Team analyzed the interviews and performed content analysis on the transcripts. This team discussed the interviews over the course of several meetings. Two members of the team coded the responses of the interviews to objectify the responses and identify the commonalities among the interviews.

Delimitations and Generalizability

This study focused upon a group of churches easily accessible to me and relied on voluntary participation of the identified churches within the Church of the Nazarene. This project sought to identify principles applicable to small churches within the chosen denomination. This research intended to build upon existing literature and research within the church health movement as well as the Natural Church Development understanding. These findings have direct implications for local congregations of the Church of the Nazarene that have been struggling or have existed in a state of long-term plateau. Accordingly, this research sought to provide principles that are applicable to small Nazarene churches. The sampling was confined to Nazarene churches in the Eastern United States, particularly in the Mid-Atlantic region and central Appalachia. This study did not assume that principles identified by this research were applicable in areas beyond the United States. The research method used would seem to apply in other denominational groups because small churches across denominational lines have similar characteristics and challenges.

Variables

The primary variable of this study was the congregation's progress toward vitality from stagnation or decline. I considered several intervening variables: socioeconomic status of the congregations, community demographics, and self-perception of the congregation related to its size and effectiveness. I completed all the interviews for the process. Variables related to research subjects were the gender of the respondents, the length of time that interviewed members had been affiliated with the church, how involved the interviewees were in the decision making process, and the tenure of the

senior pastor.

Theological Foundations

In a day and age where the value of churches is pronounced in terms other than faithfulness, a new evaluative tool is needed. This evaluative tool must be unique to the church. Andrew K. Pfeiffer points out that the key to congregational vitality is found in its faithful service to God (69). Scripturally faithful service is a valid indicator of vitality. Frequently, the call is to remain faithful to the calling that God has set before the Church. Throughout the Church's history, the biblical marks of the church have been used to measure a church's faithfulness to the biblical mandate to become the Church of Jesus Christ.

The repeated calling of the Holy Spirit to the Seven Churches of Revelation was "to remain faithful to death" (Rev. 2:13 NASB). Paul asserts, "It is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy" (1 Cor. 4:2). The Greek word translated as "trustworthy in the New American Standard is the word *pistos*, literally "faithful, steady" (Young 325). This and other biblical passages demand that the Church remain faithful to the calling. The measure of the faithfulness of the Church is found in the biblical marks of the Church.

The marks of the Church emerged from the beginning of the Christian movement as a means to identify the characteristics of the true Church in contrast to heretical or false churches (Dunning 529). While the marks of the Church are found informally in the book of Acts, one of the earliest formulations comes from the Council of Constantinople when "the Church declared itself to be 'one, holy, catholic, and apostolic'" (Berg 319). Both past and current understandings of the marks of the Church are evident due to the

indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (Dunning 529). During the ensuing two-thousand years of Church history, theologians have sought to define the Church. The marks have been revised, always in terms that are more conservative. For example, classical Wesleyan Protestantism has adopted the four classical marks of the Church—unity, catholicity, apostolicity, and holiness—along with two other identifiers of the true Church—the preaching of the gospel and the right administration of the sacraments (Berg 320).

Unity

The most common creed known to Jews in the early Church was Deuteronomy 6:4: “Hear O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!” From its inception, Israel’s faith was radically monotheistic. Accordingly, this faith featured no hierarchy of deity, no pantheon of gods; rather, Israel worshipped only the one true God (Oden 56). This tenet of faith carried over to both the early Church and the contemporary Church of today. God is one. As such, God manifests himself in the revelations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These three persons exist in community but are united as one God. The early Church clearly affirmed the unity of the Godhead. One of the earliest creeds of the Church proclaims, “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:5-6). In the same way that the members of the Godhead are united to one another, the members of the body of Christ are also united. H. Ray Dunning comments on the unity of God in the Church:

It is inappropriate to say that Christ founded the Church or that He was part of the Church; He *was* [original emphasis] the Church. All who become identified by faith with Him are “in Him” and share the unity of his person. (531-532)

In the same way that the three members of the Godhead are unified in one person, so too,

the members of the body of Christ make up one body. The fellowship within the Godhead is reflected in the *koinonia* fellowship within the body of Christ. The unity of the body is effected by the indwelling Spirit of Christ (531).

While the plethora of denominations existing in the world today might seem to dismiss the unity of the Church, the body of Christ remains united by its head and each member of the body is a significant part of that unity. Understanding the biblical concept of the unity lends greater importance that leadership seek the moving and leading of the Holy Spirit who brings about unity within the individuals that make up the greater body of Christ. The unity of the Godhead is the theological reason behind *koinonia* and assimilation into the body of Christ.

Catholicity

Catholicity, the second mark of the Church, refers to the universality of Jesus Christ's message of atonement, available to all persons regardless of race, gender, religion, or any other delimiting factor (Dunning 532). The atonement of Jesus Christ belongs to no one in particular and is available to everyone in general, upon the condition of acceptance and faith. John 3:16-17 affirms this truth:

For God so loved *the world*, [emphasis mine] that he gave His only begotten Son, *that whoever believes in Him* [emphasis mine] shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

Paul furthers this thought in Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Jesus Christ's atonement is available freely to all.

The catholicity of the Church of Jesus Christ mitigates an exclusivistic interpretation of either the Church or its message. The vital church understands its Savior

as the Savior of the whole world. Further, the vital church participates in that atonement by offering that grace to the world.

Holiness

Understanding the Church as the body of Christ on earth must also include understanding the Church's calling to reflect the character of Christ. In Matthew 5:48 Jesus says, "You are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." In this statement, Jesus adapts Leviticus 19:2, "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy." Jesus' resulting mandate challenges God's people, asserting that their characters should mirror God's character.

Scripture defines God's holiness in two different terms, his otherness and his purity. In terms of his *otherness*, he is like no other god (Isa. 46:9). He is separate from this world. In discussing the Old Testament understanding of holiness, Dunning says, "The Hebrew word *qodesh* ... is derived from a root meaning apart or separateness. It is holiness that conveys the ideas of transcendence" (187). Appropriating God's holiness for the Church in terms of its separateness from the world affirms that although the Church exists in this world, the Church is not of this world. Jesus prays for this very characteristic when he says, "I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:15-16). God's character manifested in his Church separates the Church from the world in which it exists. The Church, as well as its individual members, is set apart for the exclusive service of the Divine One. The Old Testament considered objects and people *holy* when they were sanctified, or set apart for God's exclusive use. In like manner, the Church is sanctified when it becomes God's exclusive possession, used for his purposes

and glory.

The second term Scripture uses to describe God's holiness is best translated as *purity*. Scripture defines God's holiness in term of his cleanness that further separates God from the fallen creation. The biblical narrative describes God's purity as absolute. Scripture defines God's purity in relation to God's separation from and opposition to sin, his cleanness, his brilliance or glory, and in his righteousness or moral character (Knight 36-40). Thomas C. Oden writes, "It [the holiness of God] implies that all other divine moral excellences (goodness, justice, mercy, truth, and grace) are unified and made mutually harmonious in an infinite degree in God" (99).

Called forth by the Holy Spirit, the Church can and does reflect God's holiness. Dunning states that holiness "is both an actuality and an ideal" (533). God makes his Church holy through the Holy Spirit's activity, purifying the Church and setting it apart for his unique service. This purification makes the Church distinctively and qualitatively different from the world and culture in which the Church exists. The Church is also growing towards the holiness of God, becoming more like him as it pursues relationship with him. Openness to the movement of God creates a deeper Christlikeness and the Church's journey progresses.

Apostolicity

The early Church understood itself as the recipients of the apostolic commission to spread the good news about Jesus Christ. Dunning confirms the early Church's understanding by saying, "The task of the apostles was to bear witness to the resurrection of Christ" (Dunning 533). The office of apostle was not formally renewed or continued after the deaths of the original apostles. Nonetheless, the Church continued to operate

from the apostolic calling to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ (533-34).

The Church evidences apostolicity when it spreads the good news of Jesus Christ's atonement, his salvation, and his presence in this age and the age to come. The Church is empowered to carry out its mission by the Holy Spirit (Dunning 534). A local congregation participating in Jesus' mission of reconciliation evidences the apostolicity of the Church. The vital church necessarily participates in this two thousand year old mark of the Church when it bears witness to the grace of Jesus Christ.

Word and Sacrament

The final two marks of the Church are often referred to as the *Protestant* marks of the Church. These characteristics arose to distinguish Protestantism from sixteenth century Catholicism. Dunning defines the sacramental marks of the Church as, "The church lives by the gospel, and hence the creation, maintenance and perpetuation of her life is through the word preached and rightly enacted [through the sacraments]" (534). Thus, the Augsburg Confession states, "The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered" (*The Augsburg Confession*, Article VII). While John Wesley did not insist that the word and the sacrament were marks of the Church (he preferred unity as the preeminent mark), he did understand that "[a]s means of grace, both word and sacrament are essential to the Church" (Berg 326). The body of Christ is that gathering of believers who regularly experience the teaching of the word and practice the sacraments regularly.

Vital Protestant churches emphasize the word of God preached and the sacraments rightly received. The responsibility of *rightly preached and rightly served* is not upon the person doing the preaching and serving. Rather, *rightly* refers to the word

and sacrament being received in faith (Dunning 534). The vital Church celebrates the power of the word to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ as people receive that word joyfully and in faith. Further, the vital church participates in the atonement of Christ by enacting again his death and resurrection through the bread, the cup, and the water of baptism. Through faithful participation in Christ, the Church receives its vitality and life from the creator of the Church.

A scriptural summary is in order. Each of these six marks of the Church derives from Jesus' admonishment for his followers, both corporately and individually. When asked about the Greatest Commandment, Jesus replied, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind.... The second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37, 39). Jesus' parting words to his disciples in Matthew's gospel echo this command: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). These three quotes from Jesus summarize the marks of a vital church. The Christian faith, lived corporately and individually, involves loving God, taking on his character, loving people with a love that binds together and drives motivates the members of the Church to share the good news that Christ died to redeem the world. The Christian faith is celebrated and lived out in worship through the proclamation of the word and participation in the sacraments. Through these acts, Jesus Christ is present and shares his grace with his children.

Overview of the Study

Chapter 2 of this study reviews selected literature from a variety of subjects dealing with issues related to small church strength. I surveyed literature that reviewed

and analyzed the small church as an organism. Natural Church Development concepts were explored as was literature related to the purpose-driven model. I consulted literature related to developing a missional identity and purpose within the small church. I examined the theological foundations of the small church, small church health and development, and missional identity. Based upon the literature, I developed a listing of the characteristics of a vital small church.

Chapter 3 presents a detailed explanation of the design of the project, research methodology, instrumentation, and the method of data analysis.

Chapter 4 provides the research findings.

Chapter 5 provides summary and analysis of the research as well as the universal, replicable principles identified by this project. This chapter also provides suggestions for further research and development.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE

Church size is not the primary factor by which a church can be judged as successful or influential in the modern (or postmodern) setting. Many large churches are unhealthy and not *vital* churches. Having a huge following or constituency does not guarantee the vitality or legacy of the church. The premise of this research is that small churches can become vital congregations that leave a lasting kingdom legacy upon the culture in which they exist. The purpose of this study was to identify transition characteristics of vital small Nazarene churches.

The size of a sanctuary, the number of people who attend a local congregation, or the size of a congregation's annual budget are dubious measurements of the true vitality or success of that congregation. As such, size does not always reveal vitality or health. Scripture does not mention relationships between church size and church vitality. Historically, at least since the advent of Protestantism in the sixteenth century, the church has been a movement of small churches called together by the Holy Spirit to accomplish the mission of God in the world. Programming for church growth while ignoring the deeper systemic issues of a local church leads to frustration and defeat. Many small churches suffer from *vision fatigue* brought on when leadership visits the latest *model church* and seeks to replicate their style, vision, and program in that context. After a few years of striving to replicate that model in their context, the pastor frequently gives up, pronounces the calling of God upon his or her life to another mission field, and moves on.

By recognizing that the small church plays a historical role in the advancement of the gospel of Jesus Christ and celebrating that value in the modern milieu, the pastor and

leadership of small local congregations can assist those congregations to achieve the vitality and the legacy God intends for every local church. By stressing congregational vitality and by living out the Church's the scriptural mission the Church can return to a state of vitality, impacting not only its own membership but also the immediate community and the world around it.

This study focused on a holistic understanding of vitality. Many models of church success exist in the literature today. Most models of success hold up one measure of a congregation as the primary indicator of health. Many of these models do not take into account the context in which the congregation ministers. By analyzing not only church growth but also factors such as previous members involved in ministry, decisions for Christ, members involved in discipleship programs, and the number of lives changed for Christ, a more valid understanding of the vitality of the congregation appears. Looking at a broad array of indicators reveals the true vitality of the congregation.

I have chosen intentionally to use the word *vitality* for this study. The reasoning behind my word choice is that vitality is a concept that brings little preconceived meaning to this research. Church health recently has become a buzzword often used to reveal church success. The concepts of the Natural Church Development movement, which are a measure of church health, most closely approximated my intentions with this study. Nevertheless, several different authors have prescribed many different characteristics to define *health*. As I have developed my own measures of vitality, I chose to separate this research from the church health movement. Church growth is one measure of success that has been used since the 70s as a measure of vitality of the local congregation. The philosophy behind the church growth movement states that if a church is not growing,

that church is not a vital congregation.¹ A current measurement for successful churches is *missional*. Ministry that extends the reach of the local congregation beyond its own interests is one measure of its vitality but not the complete picture. Vitality remains one of those classifications that can be understood in a holistic manner and can be discussed with little preconceived understanding. For the purposes of this study, vitality is the measure of the relative level of a congregation's participation in the mission and purpose for which Jesus Christ called them.

Scholars devised a variety of models to measure the health or strength of a congregation during the era of congregational assessment.² Some of these models have evolved to assist local congregations in becoming more successful. Other models have grown from the success of a particular congregation's history and the manner in which the congregation effectively ministered in its unique context. Research-based organizations have produced other models. Because of these research organizations' work, they have provided theories of how congregations can become healthy. Examples of these organizations are Stephen A. Macchia's Vision New England and Christian A. Schwarz's Natural Church Development model.

Models of Measuring Congregational Success

In order to understand the great confusion that has arisen within church leadership, the great variety of paradigms for evaluating congregational vitality must be discussed. In order to facilitate summary, I have organized these models under several

¹ In private conversations over the years, I have found that many colleagues will not consider answering a call to a church that is not growing.

² For the purposes of this research, I will consider the age of congregational assessment to be the period beginning with the decade of the 70s through the present time. The reasoning for this period is simply that the majority of literature dealing with congregational health, strength, or greatness was written from this point onward.

general headings.

The Good to Great Model

The impetus to undertake this research emerged from the reading of Collins' book and one he wrote with Jerry I. Porras. In these two monographs from the business world, the research identified companies that achieve a high level of professional excellence within their particular field and have achieved that excellence over a long period of time. These companies perform consistently at a higher rate, produce a higher rate of return and meet the challenges that a free-market economy often causes with a higher degree of success than the control group of companies. In order to validate his research, Collins' researchers identify a control group of companies that consisted of those companies that are generally understood to be successful but do not achieve the greatness of the eleven identified great companies (Collins 3).

Rainer has adapted the good to great model that Collins wrote for the business world for churches. In that work, Rainer sets about, through his research organization, to identify the good to great principles applicable to the Church. Rainer identifies these great churches as breakout churches (14). From this point on in his work, Rainer lays out the characteristics of these churches. In so doing, he appropriates and applies the good to great model to the world of the church.

One of the significant points in Collins' research was the understanding that each of the eleven good to great companies experienced a transition point at which they began to gather momentum in their movement towards greatness. As such, these companies were not always *great*. Each of the companies that made a transition to greatness experience a moment when the leadership of those corporations made a conscious choice

to change the direction of the company. James Collins and Jerry I. Porras describe this change as “this critical shift in thinking—the shift to seeing the company itself as the ultimate creation” (30).

In his research Rainer similarly identifies the *breakout point* as the point when the period of decline or plateau ends and growth begins (26). From this point onward the *breakout* continues for a period of several years (21).

While Collins identifies the transition point as the beginning of least fifteen years of growth above the market average, Rainer defines change after the breakout point as a period in which” [t]he church has made a clear and positive impact on the community, and there are numerous stories that lives have been changed as a direct result of this” (21).

Collins identifies steps to achieving the lasting greatness exhibited by these companies (13-14). Step one to achieving lasting greatness was the company’s leadership engaging a Level 5 leader. In contrast to much popular opinion, the Level 5 leader is not necessarily a charismatic visionary leader (Collins and Porras 7). Rather the Level 5 leader is one who has “a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will” (Collins 13). These leaders were individuals who possessed a unique blend of humility and ferocious resolve and determination to do whatever needed to be done to make the company great (30). Level 5 leaders bring with them a determination to see the corporation realize its potential for greatness while at the same time elevating the leaders around them by assigning credit and praise for the company’s success to each member of the leadership team. Collins intentionally avoids the term servant-leader to describe the leadership characteristic common to the leaders of the good to great corporations. The

phrase has too many objectionable overtones to suit the tastes of his research team.

Rainer identifies the leaders of the breakout churches as having Acts 6/7 leadership qualities. In this designation, he draws heavily from Collins' understanding of a Level 5 leader. Rainer's research shows that breakout pastors have many leadership characteristics in common with the leaders of the good to great companies.

The first of these shared character traits is confident humility (Rainer 58). Acts 6/7 leaders share a common deep personal humility. This personal humility is revealed in the leader's willingness to assume blame for the organization's shortcomings while assigning praise for its success to the other members of the leadership team. Collins is surprised to find that Level 5 leaders avoid ostentatious displays of pride and grandeur in favor of an understated simplicity in dress and deportment (26-28).

Linked to humility is an intense force of will or personal confidence in the leader's personal skills and ability to make decisions and chart the course of the business or the church for the future. Rainer offers, "[T]hey have a focus, determination and unswerving faith in what could be accomplished.... Acts 6/7 leaders displayed an unpretentious humility with their confidence" (59). The combination of humility and confidence is a remarkable paradox echoed by Collins' research. Collins likens the Level 5 leader to Abraham Lincoln, who is widely known to have exhibited great personal humility. However, "those who mistook Mr. Lincoln's personal modesty, shy nature, and awkward manner as signs of weakness found themselves terribly mistaken, to the scale of 250,000 Confederate and 360,000 Union lives including Lincoln's own" (22). The conclusion that Rainer and Collins draw is that the leaders of the great corporations and breakout churches exhibit great personal strength yoked with great personal humility.

To humility, Rainer links the incredible persistence that pastors of the breakout churches exhibit. These pastors were all long-tenured leaders who spent a significant amount of time accomplishing the tasks they understood God to have set before them. Rainer states that a part of their long-term leadership was commitment to “the fulfillment of goals regardless of the time needed to complete the task” (63). While persistence was a function of the intense personal will that Rainer’s Acts 6/7 and Collins’ Level 5 leaders possess, Rainer also concludes that persistence is a part of a long pastoral tenure.

Rainer found that the average tenure of the Acts 6/7 pastors was 21.6 years, the average tenure of the comparison church pastors 4.6 years, and the overall average pastoral tenure at the time was 3.6 years. Rainer feels strongly that the relatively long tenure of an Acts 6/7 leader is central to the breakout character of the breakout churches. To support that conviction, he states, “[L]ong tenure is one of the key requisites for churches to move from mediocrity to goodness to greatness” (58).

Within the kingdom of God, level five leadership and Acts 6/7 could be described as *incarnational*; exemplified by the ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus came to the earth in the most difficult circumstances. He was born to commoners. The focus of his ministry was the outcast and marginalized in society. Scripture describes him as the epitome of meekness. In the person of Jesus Christ, God entered human history as a person. He exchanged the glory and grandeur of heaven for the frailties of humanity:

Although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. (Phil. 2:6-8)

The Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is history’s greatest example of meekness and

modesty.

Behind Jesus' great humility was an intense force of will to accomplish the task set before him according to the gospel accounts. The resolve evidenced by Jesus' commitment to carry out the will of God in Gethsemane is but one instance of this personality trait. In that moment of Jesus' life, the temptation to abandon the task before him must have been immense, after a night of prayer, he stated final commitment to God: "Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from me: yet not what I will, but what you will" (Mark 14:36). This watershed event in the life of Christ illustrates a lifestyle of his intense commitment to complete the task God gave him to accomplish.

A second common characteristic among good to great leaders and breakout leaders is a desire and a commitment to see to the vitality and success of the company or church beyond the immediate future. Collins offers that Level 5 leaders created the circumstances for their successors to be successful. Level 5 leaders exhibit a key trait: "ambition first and foremost for the company and concern for *its* [emphasis mine] success rather than for one's own riches and personal renown" (25-26). Rainer echoes this sentiment: "One of the key distinguishing marks of an Acts 6/7 leader is the desire to see the church do well and make a difference well beyond the ministry of the current leadership" (65). In either case, the leadership characteristic is a conviction that success is more than just a momentary evaluation. True success comes in the transmission of vitality from one leadership regime to the next.

The legacy focus of the Acts 6/7 leader is further explained as "one who has a burden for a successful ministry beyond his own lifetime" (Rainer 45). The breakout

leaders were more concerned about ensuring the churches they were leading to have a legacy of strength that lasted beyond their limited time of influence. They were building the church for the future.

Collins and Porras discuss the concern for building a corporate legacy (28-31). The leaders of corporations that were built to last understood they were creating much more than a product. Their existence was not solely for the purpose of creating, manufacturing, providing, distributing, and marketing a product that would be profitable. They brought to the table a philosophy that the corporation's ultimate product was the company itself. They understood that the company was more than "a vehicle for the products.... The products were a vehicle for the company" (Collins and Porras 28).

Christ's servant leadership certainly embodied the legacy principle. The ministry of Christ set up the future success of the body of Christ. The historical person Jesus Christ knew that he would only be physically present with his followers for a relatively short time. Rather than accomplish everything that he could in his lifetime by himself, he poured his life and teaching into a group of followers of his own choosing. He spent countless hours over three years teaching them about the purpose of the kingdom and how that purpose would be lived out. He promised that after he left, he would not leave them powerless or leaderless. In John chapter 14, he promises to leave "another helper, that He may be with you forever" (14:16).

Jesus' very last command in Acts 1 reveals the commitment he had to the future power and success of the body that would come to be known as the Church. In Acts 1:14, Jesus commands the disciples to wait for the power that he would grant them:

[Jesus] commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised.... [B]ut you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not

many days hence.... [B]ut you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth (Acts 1.4b, 5b, 8).

Jesus instructed his disciples to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit in order to take the message of the gospel to their communities and around the world. The Church became the ongoing extension of Jesus' ministry.

Collins' third characteristic of Level 5 leadership is the "window and mirror pattern" (34). In describing this concept, Collins realized that Level 5 leaders attribute the company's success to those around them: the leadership of the corporation, its workers and making the right decision at the right time.

While these leaders were quick to pass on the credit for the success of their respective companies, they were also just as quick to accept personal responsibility for its shortcomings and mistakes. Collins describes Level 5 leaders:

Level 5 leaders look out the window to apportion credit to factors outside themselves when things go well (and if they cannot find a specific person or event to give credit to, they credit good luck). At the same time, they look in the mirror to apportion responsibility, never blaming bad luck when things go poorly. (35)

The Level 5 leader's personal humility contributed to the success of the great companies by elevating the other leaders within that company by assigning them great credit while taking none for themselves. The positive atmosphere created by the ongoing success of the company helped to develop an intense loyalty among the leadership team that kept the significant leaders happy and caused them to stay with the company for a significant period of time. Further, happy employees produced greater results than did unhappy employees. The positive atmosphere spawned by success produced more success.

Rainer also found that Acts 6/7 leaders quickly accepted personal responsibility

for ineffective ministry. He offers, “[T]hey refuse to blame others. They accept the responsibility that comes with being a leader” (61). Leaders of these breakout churches simply were not willing to blame others for the difficulties they may have experienced. Rainer links acceptance of responsibility to an unswerving awareness that they were able to overcome their shortcomings through the power of the Holy Spirit. In turn, the Holy Spirit empowered the church to triumph over any challenge that might threaten their success and their ability to accomplish the calling of God. Acts 6/7 leaders “see no obstacle as being so great that the church, in God’s power, cannot overcome” (61).

Rainer’s qualities of an Acts 6/7 leader and Collins’ traits of a Level 5 leader also diverge at several key characteristics. Collins’ fourth characteristic of the Level 5 leaders is an unwavering resolve to complete their purpose regardless of the consequences (30). In Collins’ research, Level 5 leaders are “fanatically driven to produce results. They will sell the mills or fire their brother, if that’s what it takes to make company great” (30). This commitment is present in Rainer’s Acts 6/7 leaders, but the fierce commitment is not to results but instead to biblical faithfulness. Rainer offers, “The Acts 6/7 leaders do far more than merely believe the truth claims of Scripture; they also passionately live out their beliefs” (54). The resolve to live biblically is the central trait of an Acts 6/7 leader.

Passion for faithfulness to Scripture is lived out in the mission of the churches that an Acts 6/7 leader serves and is reflected in the church’s ministry to and within their communities. For Acts 6/7 leaders, believing in Scripture is more than a topic about which they preach; they passionately live it out in their personal lives. The demands of Scripture form the fabric of their lives. The commitment to the demand of Scripture compels them to live out the person and message of hope of the gospel in their

community and the world.

The final characteristic of an Acts 6/7 leader is the discovery that these leaders cast visions that focused outward. While all leaders had a vision, the Acts 6/7 leaders' vision was different from the visions espoused in the comparison churches in that it consistently focused outward. Rainer states, "In other words, a key component of their vision was to reach those who were not yet a part of the church" (65). The church's focus was more than a vision statement; it was the passion that these leaders had for the ministry of their church. Acts 6/7 leaders instilled this focus into the fabric of their church. The leaders of the breakout churches were "passionate about reaching the lost and unchurched, and the visions they communicated inevitably reflected this priority" (65).

Many writers and researchers of this generation echo the importance of the need for a vision that focuses outwards from the church setting. Macchia voices this sentiment when he offers that one of the characteristics of a healthy church is an outward focus. He writes, "The healthy church places high priority on communicating the truth of Jesus and demonstrating his love to those outside of the faith" (135). This focus upon the community outside of the four walls of the churches becomes more than a demographic; it becomes the focus of a breakout church's mission. The leaders of healthy churches are passionate about reaching the unchurched people in the community around them. The measure of a breakout church's commitment to the outwardly focused vision comes in the money that they spend to reach beyond themselves and in the activities that they design to reach beyond their membership and the experiences they create to draw in those who stand outside of the fellowship.

Collins offers his second step as “get the right people on the bus (and the wrong people off of the bus) and then figure out where to drive it” (41). In drawing this conclusion, Collins is showing that people who are not motivated by the principles of the company do not contribute to the company’s success; rather, they hold it back. He concludes that the right people will be motivated to achieve great things and bring with them a predisposition to excellence. The wrong people bring inefficiency, poor motivation, and poor quality. Collins believes so strongly in the importance of leaders who are in harmony with the purpose of the corporation that he states, “In a good to great transformation, people are not your most important asset. The *right people* [original emphasis] are” (51). Excellent leaders who are in harmony with the company’s goals and purposes magnify the success of that company.

Dennis Bickers describes this principle when he offers, “Regardless of how talented or popular a person may be, if he or she lacks character and integrity, he or she has no business being a leader in the church” (74). Bickers thus confirms that the *right leadership* within the structure of the church is more important than filling leadership positions with the people who are ill-qualified to lead. Powerless or immature leaders who do not understand and who are not committed to advancing the mission of the church do much more harm than good. Creating the right leadership team is a vital stage in the development of an excellent organization.

Rainer furthers the argument. The third step of Rainer’s model is the Who/What Simultrack. Breakout churches have little problem in finding people with passion and excellence to be a part of their team:

If they come across a promising individual, they invite him or her to join the team even if there is no clear place for the person at the time. It typically does not take long before that capable and motivated person is making a difference in the church using his or her God-given gifts and abilities. (92)

Leaders of breakout churches identify people with passion and skills and then create a structure around them within which to minister.

Small congregations benefit from leaders who are passionately committed to carrying out the mission and purpose of the church. Far too often small churches are burdened by the difficulty of filling leadership positions with unqualified or immature people. Healthy churches identify and develop individuals whom God has called and given the gift of leadership and challenges them to become “servant leaders” (Macchia 115). In identifying passionate leaders, training them, and empowering them to lead from the overflow of God’s power, breakout churches create momentum and strength in their structures and in the pursuit of their vision.

A third key in the good to great/breakout model is the development of a culture within the church or organization in which the brutal reality of current situations and realities can be confronted. Rainer defines this point as the “ABC Moment” (74) while Collins offers that good to great companies “confront the brutal facts (yet never lose faith)” (65). Each research study recognizes that excellence is never achieved until the cold hard facts of the present reality of the organization are recognized, owned, and addressed.

Most *good* organizations have difficulty ever confronting the reality of their lack of greatness. Rainer believes “most church leaders are unable or unwilling to confront reality” (69). He further states, “One of the key reasons many churches today are in a

slow but deadly path of erosion is the failure of the people to accept that the church is in trouble and that immediate changes are needed” (71). In describing the difference between the good to great companies and the comparison companies, Collins notes, “one of these two companies confronted the brutal facts of reality head-on and completely changed its entire system in response; the other stuck its head in the sand” (67). One of the first stages of meaningful change is confronting painful decision that change is necessary for vitality or excellence to be achieved.

The key to overcoming the present brutal reality successfully (no matter how bleak) is never to lose faith in the future. Collins cites the example of Admiral Jim Stockdale, the ranking military officer in the infamous Hanoi Hilton. In recounting his torture and suffering at the hands of the North Vietnamese, Stockdale points to his confidence in the ultimate outcome as a reason for his ability to overcome the obstacles that mitigated against his survival. He offers, “I never lost faith in the end of the story. I never doubted not only that I would get out, but also that I would prevail in the end and turn the experience into the defining event of my life, which in retrospect, I would not trade” (85). Stockdale’s ultimate resolve enabled him to endure the hard facts of his captivity and ultimately emerge victorious.

Rainer’s breakout church leaders exhibited the same resolve. As such, the breakout church leaders had the ability to see their churches’ present reality and the direction in which they needed to go. They had a deep commitment to the faithfulness of the one who called the churches into being to bring that mission to fruition. They were insistent that people told the truth about present situations. “They used the hard truth to assist them in discerning where they should be and then used outside influences to help

them influence and leverage change” (83). Breakout leaders refused to be paralyzed by the hard reality in which they found their churches. They used a clear understanding of the reality to bring new understandings and to influence positive change. Further, the breakout leaders never lost confidence in the positive potential of a future lived within the center of God’s will.

Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James H. Furr echo the sentiment of this need to confront reality:

The leaders of effective transformations are honest with God and with themselves. They understand that the best way to lead their congregations, particularly through challenging times, is to have a realistic understanding of their capabilities and shortcomings. (31-32)

While Herrington, Bonem, and Furr apply this understanding to the leader’s own resources, it also applies equally to the situations and realities leaders face when moving a church or organization forward.

Facing the need to change is the beginning of all change initiatives. Human beings, both individually and corporately, fear change above most other things. Change brings unknown variables. In refusing to change, individuals and organizations create the cycle that will ultimately lead to their own death. The need to face change is addressed by Robert Quinn: “To turn this situation around, for the healing process to begin, people must engage in deep personal change—change that will only occur when people take active charge of their own lives” (21). For consistent positive change to occur within the life of the church, the leadership team must understand the current reality, no matter how painful, and take charge of their transition.

The fourth stage in the transformation of an organization from good to great is the discovery of its Hedgehog Concept. The term *Hedgehog Concept* is one coined by

Collins to define an organization's ability to coalesce an entire operation into one simple principle, which serves to unite the corporation. Collins defines the Hedgehog Concept as "the basic principle that unifies and guides everything" (91). A corporation's Hedgehog Concept is the one nonnegotiable principle upon which everyone must focus.

Arriving at this Hedgehog Concept is not a long and drawn out process. The Hedgehog Concept arises at the intersection of three intersecting circles. Those circles are three fundamental questions that must be answered: "What are you deeply passionate about? What you can be best in the world at? and What drives your economic engine?" (Collins 96). The confluence of these three principles provides the Hedgehog Concept for an organization. The Hedgehog Concept becomes the defining force for the leadership and rank-and-file.

The Hedgehog Concept also becomes the evaluative tool for the organization. It defines which risks are taken and which risks are ignored. The Hedgehog Concept designates which *good opportunities* do not fit within the values of the company and thus will be ignored. As such, the company's Hedgehog concept becomes the definition of at what it will be the very best. The Hedgehog Concept awakens and drives passion within an organization.

Though not explicitly so, this concept informs much of the purpose-driven model. Rick Warren states, "The starting point for every church should be the question, 'Why do we exist?' Until you know what your church exists for, you have no foundation, no motivation, and no direction for ministry" (81). From this basis, Warren goes on to present the principles behind the purpose-driven church. Every principle offered refers to the organizing purpose of that particular congregation. A congregation's understood

purpose is its motivator and evaluator.

Rainer's parallel to the Hedgehog Concept is the VIP Factor. Interestingly, the VIP Factor is not a vision statement that time, effort, or committee meetings created. In fact, most of the breakout churches did not mention a process for discovering the VIP Factor; rather, it "discovered them" (113). VIP is an acrostic that stands for "Vision Intersection Profile" (113). This factor is the intersection point of three intersecting circles that describe the congregation and leadership. Those circles are "leadership passion, community needs, and the passion and gifts of the congregation." This VIP Factor is a clear concise vision statement that guides the resources, passion, and ministry of the breakout churches (114). In arriving at the unifying vision for the congregation and its ministries, the leadership comes to understand these three components of vision and passion.

This vision statement is not always written down. In fact few, if any, of the breakout churches researched by Rainer had a *written* vision statement. They believed that they appropriated God's vision and plan for his Church, of which they were an outpost. The vision is generally broad and reflects the Great Commission and the Great Commandment as guiding principles for the life and ministry of the Church. Ron Crandall emphasizes the importance of this concept: "The most important step in the success of this process [the turn around process] is clarifying the congregational purpose" (115). Vital churches have a clear awareness of their mission and purpose and how they fit into God's plan for the kingdom of God.

In coming to understand a small church's purpose, Crandall uses diagnostic questions that fall into the same categories as Rainer's three intersecting circles.

Crandall's diagnostic questions explore the identity and purpose of the church:

Who are we? Why are we here? Whose church is this anyway? What does God expect of us? What is our special identity and contribution to this community? Where is our future? Who are the people God desires us to be responsible for? (115)

These questions serve to clarify the church's vision awareness and its direction.

Leadership must ask these questions intentionally in order to move beyond the drift that is often associated with having no vision, or a vision that is unclear.

The benefits of a unifying purpose, no matter what the terminology used to define it, are many. Crandall offers four benefits for a church operating with a single unifying purpose:

A purpose-driven church: (1) builds morale by reducing the tension of competing claims; (2) reduces frustration because it helps prioritize and clarify what needs to be done; (3) builds cooperation among those inside the church and attracts the interest and cooperation of persons and groups outside the church; and (4) assists in the regular evaluation of congregational faithfulness and effectiveness. (116)

A common purpose unifies and provides direction for the small congregation. The understood purpose defines the direction, ministry, and priorities of turnaround churches.

Rainer asserts that this VIP Factor is not a written down statement that is never to be changed or adapted to changing circumstances. While the VIP Factor is understood and clearly defined in the minds of the leadership and can be explained by the membership as a whole, the vision intersection profile is a dynamic statement. The church leadership is always sensitive to where God is moving in that day, where he was moving in the past, and where he might be moving in the future. Because of this awareness, the VIP is a dynamic statement. This dynamic vision implies that the church leadership who wishes to become a breakout church must be aware of "the possibility

that what it [the local church] is doing today may not be what God would have it to do tomorrow and it must be sensitive to God's new direction and paths" (126). To continue to operate under an outdated or irrelevant mission statement is to lose touch with the very community to which the church should be ministering.

The fifth characteristic of good to great corporations is the development of a culture of discipline. The truly great corporations have a unique ability to harness incredible creativity with a culture of discipline. This creative discipline was driven by the purposes and realities that the company faced. Collins illustrates this point by saying, "The Good to great companies built a consistent system with clear constraints, but they also gave people freedom and responsibility within the framework of that system" (125). The leadership of these companies built a culture of people who "took disciplined action within the three circles, *fanatically consistent with the Hedgehog Concept* [original emphasis]" (124). The Hedgehog Concept of all good to great companies serves to discipline the efforts and channel the creativity of these companies.

In short, development of new products, ideas, and opportunities for advancement is subjected to disciplined evaluation regarding the corporation's organizing principle. The people who make up the corporation are personally committed to the principle that guides the leadership and the direction of the corporation. Part of the task of "getting the right people on the bus is hiring and developing self-disciplined people to begin with" (Collins 126). The right people are those who demonstrate a commitment to the development of the corporation by living out its Hedgehog Concept in practical ways. People who are not committed to the success of the corporation and its principles are replaced with people who are committed.

This radical adherence to the Hedgehog Concept refuses to engage in any product, service, or principle that does not fit within its disciplined interpretation of its guiding principle. The mantra of those who are committed to the corporation's Hedgehog Concept limits the activities in which they are engaged:

Anything that does not fit with our Hedgehog Concept, we will not do. We will not launch unrelated businesses. We will not make unrelated acquisitions. We will not do unrelated joint ventures. If it doesn't fit, we won't do it. Period. (Collins 134)

Truly great corporations exhibited an unwavering commitment to be truly excellent at realizing their Hedgehog Concept.

Rainer's parallel to this Hedgehog Concept is the creation of a culture of excellence. Breakout churches uniformly spoke of a great desire to "glorify God, please the Savior or do their best in his power for his sake. In other words, we found the drive for a culture of excellence to be theologically and biblically driven" (132). Part of the culture of all of the identified breakout churches was a resolve to be excellent in ministry and relationships. This radical commitment to excellence is a natural result of a desire to be pleasing to God in all aspects of congregational life and ministry.

Some people are uncomfortable with this single-minded pursuit of excellence. After all, the body of Christ is comprised of imperfect individuals. Oftentimes the small church, in particular, is populated with people whom many in society would not place in positions where excellence is necessary. Serving rural congregations for most of my ministry, I can attest to the need to assign people to ministry positions who would not normally be assigned to that position if more qualified people were available.

Breakout churches made an intentional decision to excel in a few areas rather than

attempting to be excellent in every conceivable ministry. Rainer states, “They chose the areas in which they could be excellent and did not attempt to do everything else. Quite often the area in which the focus of excellence was most obvious was the Vision Intersection Profile” (135). These churches were fanatical in their effort to excel in the few areas where they had the most significant potential and where their leadership passion, community needs, and passions and gifts intersected. This intersection assisted breakout churches to develop high levels of excellence in life and ministry.

The decision to be excellent in a few things exhibits a liberating and empowering discipline. In choosing to excel in a few things (which are ideally in line with the VIP Concept), a church is free to use its limited resources and forced to develop its strengths. A church that chooses to excel in a few things can choose to do what it does well. The church that intentionally chooses excellence does not easily become enslaved to the legion of other ministry efforts that other churches are using. By choosing only a few things, excellence becomes a much more attainable goal. A culture of discipline according to a central organizing principle ultimately yields efforts that honor and glorify God through their high level of quality.

A sixth characteristic of good to great companies, as well as breakout churches, is their discriminate adoption of innovations. Good to great companies are aware of technological advances in industries in which they participate. They are not guilty of indiscriminately embracing technological advancement for technology’s sake. Instead, these companies analyze technological advances in light of their intersecting circles and Hedgehog Concept to apply technological advances that fit with their understanding of their unique personality, values, and purpose (Collins 152). Technological advances thus

serve to accelerate corporate growth. Further, the corporation does not depend on technology for its corporate existence; rather, technology becomes an enhancement to already sound products and practices.

Good to great companies did not use technological advances for the purpose of creating new methodology or attempting to halt market slide. Technology used by good to great companies served as an *accelerator* of momentum rather than a creator of momentum (Collins 152). In such situations, technology served to advance the Hedgehog Concept of a good to great transition.

Today's church makes extensive use of technology. Technology is generally not a contributing factor to a church's breaking out of its decline or mediocrity. Rainer offers that breakout churches are committed to the use of innovation as an accelerator of positive momentum. Innovation was used "not to create vision, but to enhance the existing vision" (152). In exactly the same way that good to great companies used technology consistent with their Hedgehog Concept, breakout churches adopt innovation consistent with their VIP Factor.

Breakout churches do not adopt innovation simply for innovation's sake. As such, these churches are not resistant to innovation; neither do they adopt innovation quickly. Rainer observes, "They are surprisingly slow in adopting new and innovative approaches. They are careful, even plodding, in making major changes" (150). This pace exists because each innovation is considered in light of the VIP Factor and purpose of the church. If a considered innovation fits within the church's understanding of its vision and purpose, the church adopted and implemented said innovation. If a proposed initiative did not fit within that self-awareness, the church rejected that innovation's adoption.

The good to great model certainly speaks to the deep needs of the Church of Jesus Christ in the modern context. This model emphasizes discipline and a commitment to be the dynamic, powerful body of Christ that is God's will for his church. In order for a church to become truly vital, the congregation must have the wisdom to discern and understand God's vision for that particular context. Once a church's leaders understand God's vision, they must have the discipline to pursue that vision with single-minded devotion. Becoming a breakout church takes servant-leaders who pattern their lives after the ministry of Jesus Christ. This leader (and leadership team) must persevere throughout the difficult task of turning around a church whose momentum is gone or, worse, is progressing towards certain death.

The Small Church Model

The past generation has seen many people denounce the small church as an ineffective and outdated ecclesiastical model. In light of modern American culture's growing affinity for the large, the rise of full-service institutions predicted the day when the small church would simply close up and go away like the neighborhood market (Schaller, *Seven Day* 47). Many authors have echoed this sentiment. For a period of time, the prevailing literature and programming for small churches primarily espoused growing to resemble the trendier larger churches. C. Wayne Zunkel offers his representation of the past understandings of the future of the small church when he states, "[S]mall churches are left with the option (1) to grow, or (2) to plateau or decline. The latter would be interpreted as a sign of terminal illness, or unwillingness to grow and apply appropriate growth techniques" (ix).

Many authors see the continued existence of the small church in strength and

vitality. Daniel R. Sanchez sees two primary factors that guarantee the continued existence of the small church, namely generational factors and the preference for small churches of certain individuals regardless of age (358). In regard to the former factor, Lyle E. Schaller concedes, “[T]here is a segment of the population that prefers ‘the convenience stores, the small cooperative stores, the family owned and operated neighborhood groceries, the small bakeries, the specialty stores and the superettes’” (*Seven Day* 150). In drawing this conclusion, Schaller offers that many younger adults are following their grandparents in this preference for service over selection (*Seven Day* 150). Sanchez concludes, “[T]here are segments of the population who prefer to be a part of a small church, and the projections seem to indicate that this trend will continue well into the next century” (358). In the ecclesiastical world, small churches are here to stay.

Small churches have existed as unique outposts of the body of Christ since the inception of the Church at Pentecost. The conviction that small churches will endure the test of time is stated by Dudley: “Small churches have a will to live—against all odds” (*Effective Small Churches* 9). He even goes so far as to proclaim the fact that the overall strength of the small church has not declined in the past twenty-five years (*Effective Small Churches* 10). Callahan states the case for the continued existence of the small congregation, “The twenty-first century is the century of small, strong congregations. In the future, there will be many mega-congregations. There will be even more small, strong congregations” (*Small Strong Congregations* vii). Small churches historically have been the expression of the body of Christ. Only within the past forty years has the large church become the preferred expression of the local church. Dudley makes his argument for the small church, “Small [c]hurches are tenacious. Some would call them tough. They do not

give up when faced with impossible problems” (*Effective Small Churches* 25). Vital small churches exhibit a toughness related to their mission and purpose. The challenge for the church to confront is to understand that a small church is a unique creation of God and for that congregation to appropriate its value and mission for the world.

Anthony G. Pappas sees three congregational realities that are converging in this age in a type of perfect storm to guarantee the existence and growth of the small church as a valid part of the ecclesiastical landscape. First, is that many of the mid-sized mainline churches will become small churches. Second, denominations are putting more effort, resources, and commitment into planting more churches. Finally, mainline denominations are putting more thought into redeveloping small churches (2-3). Many denominational executives are coming to the realization that small churches are an ongoing force for God’s glory and a significant part of the Church’s life.

The question facing small congregations is not one of size but one of vitality. The vitality of a small congregation is the true measure of the success of a congregation. However, vitality is a difficult quality to measure. The question that denominational leaders, small church pastors and the leadership teams of small churches must answer adequately is, “What does a vital small church look like?”

Small Church Theory

God calls together the small church to accomplish his purposes in the world. As such, the small congregation is a unique entity and must be understood in its own merit.

Dudley discusses the small church:

[The] Small church is not a miniature model of a larger success. It is not a church waiting to grow like an adolescent child. It only lacks resources if we impose the big-boy expectations of the American economy; in almost any other time or place, the small church would seem appropriate, even

large. (*Unique Dynamics* 5)

The ministry of the “small church comes in offering the incarnation of the living presence of God in real social relationships” (Pappas 5). When the small church is healthy and vital, it can be a “redemptive presence in society and a subversive element in our culture” (7).

Small churches exhibit an inherent determination. Small churches overcome great obstacles, which often endanger its existence. Gangel defines this endurance: “When a church’s emphasis is on shared experience rather than multitudinous functions; when preaching is central and life-related; when lay leadership is vital; and when Sunday worship is central in its life, that church is ‘tough’” (59). This quote emphasizes several crucial realities for small church health and vitality. The foundation stones upon which small churches build vitality include meaningful community, decentralized and lay-driven leadership, and vibrant worship experiences emphasizing preaching that addresses issues faced in everyday life. Jeff Patton recognizes vital small congregations as “effective mission-driven, vision-oriented, faith based, permission-giving communities that know that there is more to church life than taking up room in a pew” (15). These quotes illustrate some of the qualities exhibited by vital small congregations.

Small Church Mission

Christ called the Church into being to be the ordinary tool by which the world is touched with the gospel’s message of. Healthy churches, particularly healthy small churches, possess a powerful understanding of mission and their unique mission field. “A congregation without a mission is a club, not a congregation” (Callahan, *Small Strong Congregations* 39). The mission of a vital church is its reason for existence. Vital small

churches realize they exist to glorify God in the world and not for their own purposes.

The question to be addressed in the small church is not whether a church has a mission but what that mission is. David Ray states the problem: “Many churches of all sizes are primarily focused on their own internal and institutional life. Feeling the press of declining membership, rising costs, and numerical insignificance, many small churches retrench into a survival mentality and mode” (169). Churches that become captivated by their own survival lose their identity and vitality that comes, ironically, by their very focus on their mission (169). Many small churches have been made captive by a common difficulty—*survival syndrome*. James E. Cushman states the problem of small churches facing a survivalist mentality: “For many of our small congregations, institutional survival has become their main reason for being” (79). Small churches that exist for the purpose of surviving choose to enter the death spiral which dooms their existence.

The vast volume of information surrounding the topic can cloud the oft-discussed concept of mission. Mission is “participation with God in the transformation of human life-individual, corporate, and institutional” (Pappas and Planting xi-xii). Callahan explains the mission of the small congregation saying, “Small, strong congregations share one excellent mission as their gift with the whole community. They live a theology of service, not a theology of survival” (*Small Strong Congregations* 38). Bickers emphasizes that the small church is on a mission with God, meaning “we are committed to doing whatever He calls us to do” (99). The mission of the strong small church is not defined by the church board or by the pastor; rather, God defines the small church’s mission in response to the needs of the world in which that church exists.

In defining the mission of the Church, Madsen states, “God’s concern has always been for the world. The [C]hurch is but an instrument of God to be used to accomplish that mission. The [C]hurch is not God’s objective. The world is God’s objective” (66). The small church’s mission is never to survive, the small church’s call is to “achieve the mission of proclamation, fellowship, ministry and service” (61). A vital church reaches out to the world around it by whatever means are available to them. A vital small church “at its best, sees its mission as sharing a gift of grace. [T]he gift of mission leads, informs, strengthens, and shapes everything the congregation does”(Callahan, *Small Strong Congregations* 43). The vital small church draws its strength, health, and energy by accomplishing its mission.

Mission in the small church is not merely an organizational directive; mission something much more personal and tangible. Anthony G. Pappas and Scott Planting lists several characteristics of mission in the healthy small church: mission is personal, caring from person to person; mission is the connection between where the small church has been and where the church is, motivated by its history in light of the present reality; mission exists to fill the gaps in their world; and, the small church’s mission is organic, integral, and responsive. Mission is close to a felt need (11-13). Small churches engage in mission as an expression of God’s grace in response to the needs of the world around them.

Small Church Strengths

While many people outside of the small church dismiss the value of small churches and deem them inadequate, small churches have some inherent strengths. Many of these strengths revolve around a sense of belonging or family atmosphere.

Interestingly, family atmosphere is a major point of congregational excellence inherent to the small church that larger churches are striving to program into the characteristics of congregational life. Small churches naturally have interpersonal relationships within the structure of congregational life.

Family atmosphere. Small churches exhibit a strong family atmosphere.

Callahan observes this strength when he offers, “One of the significant qualities of small, strong congregations is that the people discover a deep sense of community” (*Small Strong Congregations* 92). Vital, living small congregations provide spaces in which relationships are developed and nurtured. The community atmosphere in the small church is more akin to the family culture than other metaphors. Gangel defines the small church family atmosphere by saying, “All churches should be macrocosms of the family microcosm. Pushed to its ultimate concern, the family finds its parallel in the universal church, the Heavenly Father, the bridegroom metaphor, and the relationship of believers as spiritual children” (57). Gangel is not alone in his presumption that the small church functions like a family. Pappas echoes the understanding:

Small churches have a unique ministry in the twenty-first century. Much of what they have to offer is what they have always had to offer: the incarnation of the living presence of God in real social relationships. The primary quality of small churches is their relational dimension. Small churches offer family-like connections. (Pappas 5)

The best metaphor by which to understand the small church is the family relationship.

Small churches, with their strong relational ties, take on many of the same characteristics of the family unity. In the vital small church, these interconnected relationships become conduits of ministry, God’s redemptive love, and the presence of Jesus Christ.

The small church’s relational emphasis connects people in powerful ways.

Accordingly relationships are treasured and provide several deep-seated human and spiritual needs. Gangel speaks of these human needs:

The primary or family group meets three needs people have. First, it gives identity. People have a name and a responsibility. They are missed when they are not there. Second, it gives people security. They belong. Third it is what Dudley means by the caring cell. People do care about one another. (57-58)

Small churches, by their very nature, excel at meeting these personal needs. People within the small church are often tied together by choice, by long-term relationships and by cultural factors. Bob I. Johnson observes the relational nature of the small church:

“Caring is the essence of the small church” (370). When asked to list their strengths, most small churches will list friendliness and caring as their primary strengths. Johnson offers that the small church is the appropriate size for members to know and care for one another (370).

Because most members of a small church know each other personally and have worked, played, cried, and celebrated together, individual members experience a unique position for ministry in relation to the other members of the family (Sanchez 359). The shared experience between members builds and strengthens the small church’s sense of family in the small church. Members of small membership churches use the terms *brother* and *sister* more than churches of other sizes. William E. Ramsden offers the following definition of the small church and explains the family culture prevalent within vital small congregations:

There are ten key characteristics: 1) It embodies the common expectation of its members. 2) In it, almost everyone knows everyone else. 3) It has a sense of family. 4) Almost everyone feels important and needed. 5) Its group functioning is simple, not complex. 6) Its identity is in the collective personality and experience rather than in programs. 7) It claims a common history and is committed to a common future. 8) It understands and lives

theology in personal, relational and historical ways. 9) It understands and implements mission in personal immediate terms. 10) It sees clergy as persons, pastors and generalists, not as specialists. (11)

These relationships often cement the small church together and add to the church's vitality. Dudley describes the relationship in the small membership congregation:

The small church embraces a wide range of characters, who are held together by blood ties, tradition and turf. Such primary relationships are warm, intimate, spontaneous and personally satisfying; by the same token, these relationships may be hot, cruel, petty and rationally frustrating. (Dudley, *Unique Dynamics* 6)

A vital small church is willing to accept the individual quirks of its membership. These personality quirks and traits often serve to deepen the connections between the members of the small church family. These relationships deepen over time and provide great meaning to its members. Notwithstanding the meaning that many draw from the close relationships within the small church, these relationships can also be the source of hurt, frustration, pain and separation.

The family culture present within most healthy small churches has implications for evangelism, church discipline, discipleship, congregational care, and governance. As such, the methodology and structures operating within a small church differ from those methodologies and structures operational in a large congregation. Recognizing the structural differences between small congregations and large congregations is not to say they are qualitatively better or worse, but they are just different.

Evangelism in a family-type congregation differs from the evangelism paradigms used in churches of other sizes. Because of the family culture, the metaphor for evangelism resembles adoption rather than multiplication. Adoption is the "process by which the new member 'joins the past' in order to share the present" (Dudley, *Unique*

Dynamics 15). Within the small church family, insiders gradually sponsor new members and then slowly incorporate these new members into the family of the church (Ramsden 11). Accordingly, newcomers are introduced to the culture, taught the family stories, brought into the organic life of the church and then taught to take appropriate responsibility when they are ready (Ray 208). The adoption is finalized when illustrated by the church supporting the newcomer in times of crisis and the newcomer providing support for other members in similar times (208). Adoption evangelism likely takes a significantly longer period of time to accomplish because “a family can adopt only a limited number of children successfully at a time, and it cannot get too big or it will be unable to retain its effective single-cell character” (Ramsden 11).

Discipline in the small church is likely more personal and relational in form. People within the church know each other so well that when one member stumbles, the other members pray for, support, and correct the struggling member. Because of the deep relationships operational in a small church, discipline is far more likely to occur at a much earlier stage than in a larger congregation (Sanchez 361). As a result of the strength of the relationships involved in a small congregation, the small church is in a unique position to practice loving discipline from a biblical perspective. The small church notices a person who chooses an inactive lifestyle or fails to live up to the standards of the community very quickly. The members of the family intervene more rapidly than in larger congregations, loving the wayward member back into the fold (361).

In vital small congregations, *discipleship* often occurs in a much more holistic manner than in the programmed model of the larger congregation. Further, a unique characteristic of discipleship in the smaller congregation involves the likelihood that

discipleship will occur in a variety of settings, both official and serendipitous. Christian education and discipleship in the smaller congregation has three primary goals: “1) inclusion, or voluntary association with and involvement in the church; 2) identity, or bringing people to freely confess to being a Christian; and 3) discipleship, or helping them maturely and consciously act as disciples of Christ” (Ray 131).

The smaller congregation can offer a safe setting in which members can grow in grace, make mistakes, and mature. Further, the smaller congregation can provide individual relationships that encourage people to grow and find examples after which to pattern their lives. Thus, identity and shared history become avenues for the spiritual growth of the disciple (Johnson 374). Johnson affirms the importance of the informal discipleship of the smaller congregation: “The small church is uniquely capable of adopting people into the community of believers and nurturing them in the faith” (374). Because of the strong interpersonal relationships found in the smaller congregation, the network for discipleship is already in place. Larger congregations must program the relationships that occur naturally within the small congregation.

Dudley posits, “[T]he small church exists as a *single cell* [original emphasis] of caring that includes the whole congregation” (*Effective Small Churches* 40). In these *caring cells*, everyone has a place in the fabric of the congregational society. Caring cells not only provide meaning and order, but also provides the framework from which the physical, mental, and spiritual needs of the congregation are addressed (44-46). Johnson observes, “Caring is the essence of the small church” (370). Smaller congregations have the ability to function as caring cells precisely because they are small. People go to and join small churches because they want to be known and be involved in the life of other

people. Members of smaller congregations have the time to take care of their constituents because these congregations are not consumed with keeping the organization running (Ray 153-55).

Within the congregational relationships, social events, worship, and serendipitous meetings outside of church become events for sharing Christ's love and providing care (Johnson 370-71). These expressions of care come from the whole congregation rather than only from the professional pastor. Further, such expressions of care emerge from the love that each member has for the other members. In the small church every member of the family is important to the body (Pappas 6).

Johnson links the small church's caring ministry of the small church to the parable of the lost sheep and to Jesus' command for the disciples to wash each others' feet in John 13 (371). In making this analogy, Johnson observes that the small church is uniquely positioned to notice the one lost lamb immediately and subsequently to pursue its safe return. Johnson goes further to make the analogy that larger churches employ a professional person as the care-giver to "exercise a surrogate ministry of caring on behalf others" while from necessity, members of smaller churches take such ministry upon themselves (371). The ministry of caring is a preeminent one in vital small congregations.

By virtue of the small number of people comprising a small church and the intimacy of the relationships that develop and hold the congregation together, the nature of congregational *governance* in the small congregation vastly differs from the governance seen in larger churches. Operating as a family, the vital small church makes decisions in a matriarchal or patriarchal manner. Oftentimes leadership structure in the small church is not formalized. The organizational structure of the small church "tends to

be much looser, more informal, more democratic and it allows for decisions to be made by consensus with a special concern for families and individuals” (Gangel 58). The organizational structure within a small congregations functions as a family unit.

Leadership within the small church rarely functions according to the business world’s top-down leadership model. Pappas notes, “The small church is not a pyramid of power with the pastor at its apex. ‘Orders’ barked by the small church pastors are much more likely to be disobeyed or ignored than to be obeyed” (80). The decisions made in the small church are much more likely made by a consensus of the congregants and likely occur in informal discussions and caucuses rather than in formal meetings or committees (Johnson 374).

The locus of power in the small church does not lie in the hands of the pastor, regardless of his or her understanding. As such, the pastor in the small church setting functions much more like a manager than a leader. The true seat of power in a small church may lie in the hands of the treasurer, a significant leader, or a few dominant families. The true power may not even lie within the official boards and committees of the church. Both the pastor of the small church and the members of the small church often realize that God owns the church, but they also know who owns the voting shares and control of the congregation (Dudley, *Making the Small Church* 70). In the governance of the local church, the laity holds the power due to the small church’s relational nature:

People do not always trust the pastor, but they can trust each other because of long-standing relationships. They know that pastors come and go rather quickly in the small church. Members however have often been a part of the culture of the congregation for a long time and have served to hold the congregation together in between pastors serving for short tenures. (Johnson 375)

The long-term relationships between the members of the small congregation serve to provide organizational stability. The members of small churches trust each other.

Personal ownership. The personal investment of time, involvement, and resources that members of the small church willingly give to their church, creates a high level of *personal ownership* of the ministries, programs, and atmosphere. Dudley speaks to the issue of personal ownership: “Members show a strong sense of ownership, of belonging. ‘This is *our* [original emphasis] church,’ they say. Members have a strong sense of belonging” (*Effective Small Churches* 33). A high level of ownership and investment can be a decided strength for a small church: “Members of small churches have a strong positive attachment to ‘our church’ that they have chosen over other alternatives, and which they will defend against every adversary” (*Unique Dynamics* 5). The attachment that the small church members experience results in determination to participate in that congregation’s life and to ensure that it carries on its mission.

Because small churches do not have the same financial or human resources as larger churches, smaller churches are forced by necessity to do more for themselves (Ray 90). A do-it-yourself mentality increases greatly the sense of personal ownership in the church, its systems, and its ministry. People give to what they have personal ownership; they support that to which they belong. A high level of personal investment characterizes the culture of the small church.

Lay driven ministry. Schwarz defines a gift-oriented ministry as one of his quality characteristics for Natural Church Development (24). Gift-oriented ministry reflects an understanding that God calls and enables all members of the body of Christ to accomplish ministry roles when they are enabled and empowered by his Holy Spirit.

George Barna furthers the argument:

Highly effective churches agree that ministry is not the domain of spectators, it must be populated by activists... From the first time a newcomer visits the church, he/she discovers a core expectation: [a]ctive involvement in receiving ministry services as well as providing ministry. (*Habits* 58)

God has a high expectation for each member of the body of Christ upon whom he lavishes his grace. Reflecting God's expectation for his disciples, Warren writes, "[God] expects every Christian to use his or her gifts and talents in ministry" (365). Vital congregations involve its membership in ministry opportunities according to the members' spiritual gifts and passion.

Reggie McNeal understands that a new reformation is occurring within the world today, particularly within the ecclesiastical world. That reformation works to free God's people from the oppressive structure of the institutional church to realize the ministries to which God has called them (43-45). Vital small congregations have a natural pipeline to incorporate new members into the ministry of that church.

Small churches lack many of the resources that larger churches have. Nonetheless, for vital ministry to occur in the smaller congregation, everyone must use his or her gifts for ministry. As a method for breeding effective congregations, Barna proposes minimizing paid staff positions and maximizing lay ministry (*Habits* 61). Ministry in vital smaller congregations is naturally lay driven. These churches must capitalize on the laypeople's ministry resources if they wish to remain valid. The small church's very dependence upon the priesthood of all believers to accomplish ministry tasks is an inherent strength in vital small congregations.

The lay-centered ministry of a small church represents a principle that keeps small

churches vital and valid in the megachurch world. Macchia emphasizes the importance of lay-centered ministry: “History teaches that when laypeople are involved, churches thrive. When elitist clergy take over, a church dies” (29). Further, Macchia states, “[T]he cutting-edge church today is high on giving laypeople permission to do ministry in accordance with their spiritual gifts” (30). The leadership and ministry of vital congregations do not lay in the hands of its professional clergy, but in the hands and efforts of the laity.

In small, vital congregations, the laypeople are as important, if not more important, than professional clergy leadership. The laity of the congregation acts as the backbone of ministry in the small congregation. In small churches, the laity provides the majority of the available resources for ministry both in terms of financial and human resources. The laity has carried the denominational burden, kept the church infrastructure intact, and provided the ministry of the small church: “Small churches by necessity have learned to be self-sufficient” (Ray 99).

Vital congregations recognize the importance and value of lay-centered ministry. Small churches depend on the involvement of its members to carry out ministry. Schaller emphasizes the need for lay involvement in ministry: “Deeply committed, gifted and experienced laypersons can, if permitted and equipped, provide every facet of leadership required by these small congregations” (*Small Congregation* 84). Lay-centered ministry in the vital small congregation grounds the ministry of the small church firmly within biblical guidelines. Lay-led ministry is a vital characteristic of the small-membership congregation.

Small Church Weaknesses

For all of their inherent strengths, small congregations also present some unique difficulties that must be addressed. Small churches exhibit some characteristics that may, if not dealt with sufficiently, create glaring weaknesses that can cripple or kill a small-membership church. Interestingly many of these weaknesses are the antithesis of the strengths of a vital small congregation.

Inadequate resources. Perhaps the greatest weakness confronting small congregations is lack of adequate resources for financial backing, healthy leadership, and facilities and grounds. Dudley offers, “[T]he congregation does not have resources to achieve a standard goal. Those congregations with fewer members are usually less able to generate the human, material, and financial resources to retain an ordained resident pastor and support a full program of church activities” (*Effective Small Churches* 23). One of the significant barriers blocking small congregations’ vital ministry or vital transformation is inadequate resources and rundown facilities, both of which refer to a lack of financial stability (Crandall 60-61).

Small churches might also face difficulties such as “inadequate program, inadequate field, inadequate evangelism, inadequate vision and inadequate personalities” (Madsen 19-26). Many congregations reflect inadequate vision and personality that reflects a mind-set of poorness or inadequacy. While a small congregation can do very little to correct the inadequacy of a small constituency from which to draw new converts or members, a great deal can be done and said regarding evangelism, vision, program, and personalities. Vision, programs, outreach, and personalities refer to a congregation’s desire and willingness to respond to pertinent needs in the surrounding community.

Gangel attributes many churches' small size to inadequate resources (59). Such churches often possess inadequate resources for supporting the programs, staff, and buildings needed for the church to thrive. The rising cost of pastoral salaries represents an example of resource inadequacies faced by small churches. Madsen summarizes the burden that staff salaries place on smaller churches: "Many small churches are in financial difficulty because they are attempting to support a full-time ministry geared to the geographical concept of parish based on horse-and-buggy travel which provides too small a base" (38). Building maintenance represents a further drain on resources for small churches. Pappas explains the serious burden building maintenance costs represent: "The cost of buildings is a *threat* [emphasis mine] to our small churches" (9). Small churches often have "inadequate budget[s] in most instances, that may lead to a high rate of turnover in pastors" (Madsen 16). A large portion of small churches' monies are designated to pay mortgage payments that exceed their means, upkeep of a building that seats ten times the current attendance, or highly trained professional clergy persons to be their pastor.

Small congregations face difficulties other than financial limitations. Human resources in a small congregation are often stretched beyond the breaking point. Small churches lack sufficient people to staff various programs that are *necessary*. The varied ministries that large congregations offer place pressure on small churches to offer more ministries than the congregation can recruit volunteers to staff. A small church is "hard pressed to maintain an organizational and committee structure that permits it to participate fully, completely and in a satisfying way in the life of the denomination and the community" (Madsen 16). Small churches with denominational affiliations need more

people than are available to fill *required* leadership positions. The prescribed number of leadership positions that must be filled prohibits smaller churches from creating new ministries. Bickers summarizes the problem: “Some small churches simply have few if any people available to do lay ministry or to provide leadership in the church. Many of these churches will probably not survive unless they take some immediate steps to change this situation” (132). Vital smaller churches must be creative in dealing with limited volunteers and resources.

Poor self-esteem. Many small churches are paralyzed by their self-identification as small, weak, and inadequate. Small churches often communicate a negative self-image in communication, programs, and casual speech. Pappas observes, “Negative ‘scripts’ threaten small churches. Some small churches are dying by their own lines, lines such as ‘We’re too small,’ ‘Nothing we try ever works,’ ‘What’s the use?’ or ‘Where are the good old days?’” (8). The ecclesiastical culture at large amplifies this theology of smallness and inadequacy, telling the small church that success is defined by size and range of services.

Much literature pertaining to small churches promotes growth as the only path to success or faithfulness to God’s calling. Schaller describes the need for a small church to grow numerically:

There are three ways to describe a barrier [to growth]—wishing or willing. Moving up off the plateau requires that will. Second, for most of us the status quo is more attractive than change. And third, their system for attracting new people is not working. Are we willing to make those changes? Usually the answer is no. (*44 Steps* 55-58)

The preceding statement implies that healthy churches desire growth, and unwillingness to pay the price for growth offers the only reason for a church not to grow.

Often after exploring reasons for lack of church growth or otherwise finding fault in the small churches, leaders and members offer a lengthy program for small church revitalization. Examples of program-centered renewal guides are Paul N. Hazelton's *7 Steps to Revitalizing the Small-Town Church*, Gene Williams' *In the Shadow of the Steeple*, or Schaller's own *44 Steps Up off the Plateau*. Sadly, small church leaders read these books, and their already dismal self-esteem sinks to a new lower level than before. While these approaches are not inherently wrong, churches and leaders should exercise care not to assume that small automatically equals weak.

Understanding the Great Commission as a mandate for numerical growth often further diminishes the already lowered self-esteem of a small church burdened by the idea that small equals weak. Members of most small churches often see relatively little numerical growth, and ultimately they conclude that they do not fulfill their calling and mission or therefore must not belong to a very good church.

Denominational hierarchy often perpetuates the fallacy that small churches are inherently weak and of lesser value. Madsen concludes, "The concept of 'smallness' with its negative image may be forced upon many of today's churches by the denomination and its patterns" (17). Past denominational leadership has expected all churches, including small churches to establish certain programs and certain structures. Denominational hierarchy expected small churches to carry out these programs. Failure to do so labeled these churches as failures (Johnson 369). Loren Seibold observes, "From the denominational headquarters on down, the accepted fact is that good churches are big churches" (64). The understanding that vital small churches will become bigger churches contributes to the already poor self-esteem of small churches.

In the modern, consumer-driven culture, smallness can place an excessive burden upon the small congregation. If a church, its pastor, and its leadership seeks self-actualization through numerical growth and defines success by size and significance, they are missing the point (Gangel 61).

The small church's survivalist mentality often engrains poor esteem into the congregation's collective psyche. Because of their small size, members fear that no one would be attracted to their fellowship. Further, members often fear that a lack of new growth automatically means no new life and no new resources for ministry. The *survival cycle* can lead to an institution's slow, painful death. Leadership usually faces this dilemma by taking measures to ensure the institution's continued viability. Ironically, the decision to *just survive* is a decision can seal the death of that church.

Many small churches slip into the mode of pursuing survival. Jane Hannah observes "Small congregations very easily become absorbed in simply surviving" (8). Patton considers the survivalist mentality a roadblock in the renewal of the church he pastored. Responding to churches' adoption of a survivalist mentality, he offers, "If we do not have a vision for God's work in this place, how can we survive, let alone thrive?" (64). Further, poor self-image causes churches and leadership to lose sight of what God can accomplish in their midst. As churches and leaders lose their vision, they weaken. Institutional survival, rather than working with God to bring about God's kingdom on earth, becomes these churches' reason for existence (Cushman 79). Summarizing the ingrown attitude prevalent in struggling small churches, Madsen says, "The people begin to feel that they are on the margins of life instead of being a part of the center. The church often turns inward in such situations in an attempt to perpetuate itself" (32).

Traditionalism. One of the strengths of the small church is its strong tie to the past because the small church offers a collection of people with a shared history. As such, members often remember the same stories, events, and celebrations. Their relationships tie them to the past while their shared history gives them meaning and comfort. Dudley calls these small churches “culture carrying congregations who bring their identity from the past” (*Unique Dynamics* 6). Nevertheless, the tie to the past can anchor the church in unhealthy or dying paradigms. Further, Dudley asserts that an identity that is drawn only from the past can hamper the church’s forward movement. These two elements [single-celled group and culture-carrying congregation] offer the most resistance to those leaders who seek to help the small church to grow, or change, or disappear” (7). These small churches become stalled by “[t]raditionalism, namely, the attitude that what has been must always be is the argument for never trying anything new: ‘We’ve never done it that way before’” (Pappas 7). Traditionalism is “the attitude that what has been must always be” (7). Churches stalled by traditionalism have sanctified a particular point in time. These churches cannot conceive that God can work in new ways different from how they experience his work in the past.

Churches stalled by traditionalism remember how God used many tools in the past to bring them to their currently reality. When these memories lock a church in the past, they become the tool for decline. A sure sign that the past is hindering a local congregation occurs when “reference to the past begins to overshadow plans, dreams, and hopes for the future of the congregation” (Schaller, *44 Steps* 43). An unhealthy tie to the past mission, methodology, and membership of a church weakens and limits the effectiveness and vitality of that congregation.

Exclusivity. A further weakness of small congregations “may be called an exclusionary atmosphere” (Gangel 60). Small church members value the relationships they build with one another. These relationships take great time, effort, and risk to build. Naturally, members of a small congregation treasure these relationships. Nonetheless, these relationships can serve to keep others out. Members of small churches find great pleasure in the security that these deep relationships offer. Hannah states, “Small churches may revel in the pleasures and securities of the community that their members find among themselves” (8). A down side to close relationships within the small congregation is evidenced by the exclusivity of these relationships (Sanchez 365).

An exclusionary atmosphere may be an intentional response or more likely, an unintentional response to the comfort and connections felt within the small church’s membership (Sanchez 365). As a result, the very bonds of connection can function as the walls that keep other people out. The members of these small churches consider those with whom they are connected members. Because of the feelings of connectedness the members exclude any person not immediately connected through those relationships. Membership is the filter that keeps others out (Gangel 59). Membership filters out those who do not fit with the insiders. Schaller describes this dilemma: “Seniority, tenure, and kinship or friendship ties with the members of the nominating committee ... outweigh skill, wisdom, creativity, competence, and experience in other congregations or enthusiasm in choosing policy makers” (*44 Steps* 45). Only when an outsider is accepted into the inner circle of membership are they accepted (59). Declining small churches use membership to exclude newcomers.

Dudley asks a similar question: “Why do small churches not grow? (*Unique*

Dynamics 13)“ In answer to his own question, Dudley explains, “Small churches are already the right size for everyone to know everyone else. They cannot include more members without letting go of the contact they now have with the present body” (13). Members of small churches often expect to know everyone else in the fellowship. Accordingly, including many more members threatens that intimacy. As a result, a church often seals itself off from the outside world in order to preserve the intimacy of fellowship that they value so highly.

Pastoral discouragement. Gangel describes a final weakness of the small church as pastoral discouragement (60). Pastors of small churches often fall prey to the small church’s poor self-image as well as the negative image others have of small churches. Small church pastors are often burdened by the fact that “[d]enominational staff and fellow clergy will often question the motivation for staying and constantly badger the pastor to consider moving to a ‘more challenging position’” (Madsen 45). These small church pastors often appropriate the poor image that others have of small churches. The pastor’s poor self-image and the poor perception that he or she has of the church builds resentment and often fuels a desire to move on to more challenging positions. As a result, ministers often see small churches as stepping-stones to larger churches as they gain valuable ministry experience. Envisioning a church as a stepping stone to the next rung of the ladder yields a disconnect both on the pastor’s part as well as the congregation’s (Bickers 104).

That small churches usually have shorter pastoral tenures than larger congregations further complicates the concept of pastoral discouragement. Members often consider the pastor an outsider or a foreigner to their culture and are thus resistant

to changes they view as short-term (Gangel 60). Further, because small churches cannot pay competitive salaries, they often hire a pastor who is not a match to their church culture. Because they cannot afford a more qualified candidate, “[t]hey settle for availability rather than precise skills that may be in keeping with the church’s understanding of what it wants and needs” (Madsen 37). Frustration quickly builds on the part of each party because expectations are left unfulfilled.

Unfulfilled expectations and unrealistic time frames also lead to pastoral discouragement. When pastors assume the mantle of leadership in a small church, they often believe that they are responsible to *turn around* a particular small church. These pastors expect growth; after all, church growth is one of the primary indices of success. After a short time, if the goals remain unmet, the pastor becomes disillusioned. Schaller attributes the excessive impatience of the competent, energetic, enthusiastic, visionary, transformational pastor as a contributing factor in short-term pastorates (*44 Steps* 68).

Complicating the matter still further, many young inexperienced pastors just out of seminary are not equipped to deal with the unique nature of the small church pastorate. These recent alumni are well versed in Hebrew and Greek languages, theology and pastoral administration. Still, a seminary education is often insufficient to prepare them for ministry in a small congregation (Bickers 106). Small churches are motivated by relationships and love rather than rapid growth and high finances. If the model of ministry for which a minister is prepared is a high-growth model, they are sure to become frustrated and discouraged with the pace of growth in the small congregation.

Theories for the Transition of the Small Church

A large number of small churches exist in the United States and around the world

today, and many of these churches are in a state of plateau or decline. Schaller's research demonstrates the number of small churches that have plateaued or are declining:

65 to 85 percent of all churches over ten years old are shrinking in number or are on a plateau in size. A more startling generalization is that the majority of members ... are more comfortable with stability or decline than with the changes required to move up off the plateau. (*44 Steps* 23)

Given the reality of the decline of small churches, pastors and leaders must come to a new understanding of the possibilities for ministry and faithfulness of ministry possible in the small church context. A new understanding of the potential for the church and its ministries can catalyze a transformation from decline to renewed vitality in the small church.

If the small church is understood as an enduring and viable model for the body of Christ in the immediate generation and beyond, then small churches can be great churches. The implication of such an understanding is small, struggling, unhealthy churches can make the transition to great small churches that are tools of the advancement of the kingdom of God.

Howard Snyder identifies five interrelated dimensions of the renewal of the church: "Personal renewal, Corporate renewal, Conceptual renewal, Structural renewal and, Missiological renewal" (285-91). Snyder's fivefold pattern can serve to guide the small church leaders in the stages to the renewal and revitalization for small churches. Much of the literature regarding the transition of small churches can be grouped into these five categories.

Personal Renewal

Renewal of the church's people serves as one of the key components to any renewal movement. Scripture asserts that the Holy Spirit calls the Church into being

(Acts 2). Historically, whenever a renewal movement impacts life and culture, people have turned individually and corporately to God and the manifestation of his presence in the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, personal renewal then is “a dramatic, decisive experience that gives greater peace and joy” (Crandall 43). Personal renewal serves to revitalize the small church due to the effect upon the relationship structure within that church.

In one transformation case study, Patton discovered the powerful need for personal renewal during the transition process. Patton’s first lever for transition was prayer (51). As such, prayer is the key to personal and corporate renewal at any level. Patton leveraged the transition of his small church in north central Pennsylvania through corporate prayer. Patton comments on the power of prayer in renewing the church:

Many of the greatest movements in the church began with prayer. Prayer is central to the work of God and is essentially linked to the movement of the Holy Spirit in a person’s life and to the community of faith. (51)

Further, Patton states, “I know that God is able to do so much more with us when we honestly seek God in prayer. Prayer changes us. Prayer is the vital pathway of transformation as we live out our faith in a real world” (55). Spiritual vitality in the culture of small congregations begins in concerted prayer.

Crandall emphasizes prayer as an arena of life contributing to personal renewal. He observes, “Prayer is usually the starting point for personal renewal for members of the congregation just as it is for the pastor” (47). Members of the body stay connected with God and his will through the means of prayer. Crandall further states, “Prayer links us to God’s active presence” (47). The experience of regular, passionate communication with God reminds his followers that despite the difficulty of the circumstances; God is able and is the source of strength.

Gary Farley describes fifteen steps for leading a stable rural church off the plateau. These steps emphasize the need for active prayer. Farley's fifth step instructs, "Involve the church in active aggressive prayer. Pray that God will help the church use its strengths and overcome its weaknesses in effective ministry" (63). While Farley does not pursue this thought further, clearly prayer is foundational to many of the remaining steps toward renewal.

Schwarz highlights personal renewal as a central principle in his Natural Church Development model for congregational vitality. He writes, "The point separating growing and non-growing churches ... is a different one, namely: 'Are the Christians in this church on fire? Do they live committed lives and practice their faith with joy and enthusiasm?'" (26). A direct relationship exists between the vitality of any church and the passionate experience of God that the church's people experience.

Personal renewal begins with individuals seeking the presence of the incarnate Christ through dynamic renewal of all of life. Jerry Mayo states the need to experience Christ: "The heart of God incarnate—made real and available in Jesus—is the divine presentation of unmerited and unconditional love. This is the heart that enlivens the body of Christ" (48). The heart of personal renewal is the experience of Jesus Christ and the renewal of Christ's image in the human heart and condition. Mayo comments on this powerful principle of renewal. In his work, Mayo argues that the same Christ who resurrected Lazarus has the power and desire to resurrect the powerless church of the modern age. The primary tool for renewing the power of the small church involves recovering God's heart in the Church. Mayo further states, "True Lazarus churches focus on Jesus' love and confess the faith that Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior of the World

and the Lord of all. They experience the power of God in Christ ... and become vitally alive because the focus is true” (53). Echoing the aforementioned ideas regarding passionate spirituality, Schwarz states, “The quality characteristic ‘passionate spirituality’ demonstrates empirically the theological core of the matter in church growth: the life of faith as a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ” (27). A central catalyst to the renewal of declining, plateaued churches is passionate spirituality illustrated by a dynamic personal experience of God.

Much of the literature and discussion regarding the cultural shift from modernism to postmodernism emphasizes that the pre-Christian population is seeking God. Nonetheless, they are not seeking the formalized and impotent God of the modern church. Most thinkers accept that postmoderns seek a dynamic relationship with a God who makes a vital personal difference and worldwide difference. Regardless of size, vital congregations experience God in dynamic and passionate ways.

Corporate Renewal

In churches transitioning from a state of low vitality to a state of higher vitality in general, the congregants, either in whole or in part, experience renewal. When a group of people unites for renewal, the organization of which they are a part experiences renewal. Churches experiencing the transition to greatness experience corporate renewal through worship and discipleship.

Corporate renewal exemplified through spiritual and relational vitality.

Herrington, Bonem, and Furr’s work, asserts that spiritual and relational vitality provide the foundation for transformation (16). Many other authors agree that transformation is a spiritual issue. For example, Gilbert Rendle states, “Leadership is essentially a spiritual

issue. Congregations are faith communities. Their ongoing purpose is to introduce people to a relationship with God ... which can be life changing” (22). Further, Alan Nelson and Gene Appel observe the nature of change in the church as an efficient process and hint at the interrelationship between spiritual and relational vitality. Nelson and Appel further describe the change process in churches as more efficient than the same processes in other organizations because churches possess the Holy Spirit. Churches emphasize relationships, and church history and higher callings prepare the church for change (46-48). While Nelson’s and Appel’s statement hints at the renewal necessary for transformation Herrington, Bonem, and Furr describe explicitly that spiritual and relational vitality must exist in order for effective and lasting transformation or renewal to occur.

Corporate renewal exemplified through worship. The corporate renewal in vital churches results in worship, which is indicative of the new passion at work in the life of the congregation. Barna observes, “Naturally, the key to spiritual revival of any kind is the *presence of the Holy Spirit and the openness of the people to the working of God’s Spirit* [original emphasis]” (*Turnaround Churches* 42). A church body committed to personal renewal experiences corporate renewal. Corporate renewal, extending beyond isolated individuals to the majority of the body, catalyzes the renewal and revival of the congregation. Crandall speaks of the resulting change: “A renewed congregation is more powerful in God’s hands than a collection of isolated Christians” (43). Corporate renewal is the recreation of a church’s passion for God’s presence to be acting within the life and ministry of the church.

One of the powerful indicators of corporate renewal is dynamic worship services

in which God moves. These renewed worship services are attractive to both current members and outsiders who hunger for a personal experience of God. Much literature has been written to assist pastors and leaders in creating worship services attractive to outsiders. Warren's purpose-driven model depends upon worship to draw the pre-Christians standing outside of the faith. Warren states, "Worship is a powerful witness to unbelievers if God's presence is felt and if the message is understandable" (241). In order for worship to become passionate, God's presence is experienced, his grace is freely available to those worshippers who seek him, and God's power is displayed for all to see (242). Passionate worship transforms the meaningless forms that hinder a personal experience of God into forms that promote a dynamic and powerful experience of God.

While many writers and consultants prescribe inspiring worship as a means for church growth, Schwarz defines the term inspiring worship as a pursuit created not by human effort but by God's work in the midst of his people. Schwarz offers, "It [the word inspiring] deserves clarification. Inspiring worship is to be understood in the literal sense of *inspiratio* and means an inspiredness that comes from the Spirit of God" (31). Schwarz concludes that God's active presence in the worship of his people will exert a profound and powerful effect upon the worship service and atmosphere.

The aforementioned pattern of worship is not the pattern used by people who are attending a service and observing the liturgy out of a fearful sense of duty. Truly powerful and dynamic worship is a characteristic of people who are in the process of being renewed in God's image. Thus, those who are being renewed grant God the freedom to move in his worship service as he sees fit. Dynamic worship is a sign of a faith community God is renewing.

Crandall describes worship not as a means to church growth or a method for attracting new people to a body of believers but states, “Worship is . . . an end itself, the goal of our living and dying” (52). Worship occurs in corporate life when the congregation experiences God’s transforming power, as God moves into the human existence to reorient life and priorities to make sense out of otherwise senseless experiences (Bickers 43). Not only the function of a service on Sunday, true worship involves all personal and congregational life and existence. In true worship, “God is the focus of our worship, and as his people he must remain the ultimate priority in every aspect of our congregational experience” (Macchia 42). Paul reminds disciples that true worship is a total experience of a life lived for God:

I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. (Rom. 12:1-2a)

The renewal in corporate worship that vital small churches exhibit is the direct result of new dynamic personal experiences of God that occur in corporate and individual worship.

Recently the Christian church, its leaders, and its membership have experienced much conflict regarding worship style. The style of worship has become the tool used to evaluate *true worship*. Worship style has been mistakenly identified as the primary evangelistic tool drawing people into the fellowship of the church. Nonetheless, churches that have transitioned from the death spiral to renewed vitality do not mistake worship style as the primary evangelistic tool that effected their transition. For such churches, relevant worship is an expression of their focus on their mission to the community in which they exist and minister.

Great congregations incorporate worship styles that speak the language of the culture in which the congregation exists. The art is for the music to match the message and the congregation. Dynamic worship occurs when the service exhibits a strong sense of belonging and community. The worship service “does not need to contain gimmicks and razzle-dazzle. Rather ... people experience their togetherness in a profound way amidst the dynamic gospel that shares with them help and hope” (Callahan, *Twelve Keys* 24). Vital worship services connect the worshippers to God and to each other in meaningful ways.

Patton asks, “Does our worship speak the language of the people that we want to reach? Does our worship result in changed lives? Indigenous worship that changes lives is what is important, not the style that worship takes” (79). The vital congregation seeks to create worship services that reach the community in which they exist. Dale Galloway emphasizes the importance of relevant worship claiming, “Cutting-edge churches that are reaching people today are culturally relevant in their music and in their preaching” (37). Jesus spoke to lost people in parables and stories they could understand (Mark 4:9-12). In the same way, great churches know that vital worship speaks the language of the people gathered to experience God’s transforming grace.

Corporate renewal exemplified through increased discipleship. Renewal within the body of Christ not only is illustrated through renewed worship but it also is illustrated by renewed commitment to discipleship. Jesus’ Great Commission to the church commands that disciples to reproduce themselves. Jesus Christ emphasized that his followers should focus on teaching others and teaching each other the lessons Jesus had taught them while he was with them on earth. The Christian walk does not revolve

only around worship services; rather, the Christian walk is a corporate journey in which fellow believers connect through their pursuit of Christlikeness. A crucial key to the transition of a congregation, particularly a small congregation, is the development of a culture of discipleship.

Small churches are poised uniquely to capitalize on the renewal of congregational discipleship. In the small congregation, discipleship is not limited to one ministry or program. Sanchez understands that “[d]iscipleship [in the small church] is an ongoing process that occurs in the Sunday School classes, Church Training sessions, Youth activities and even the fellowship events of the church” (358). Due to the very intimate nature of the relationships within a small church, mature Christians often realize the needs of younger members and personally invest in their spiritual formation. Sanchez references Acts 2:42 stating, “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” All of the early Church’s functions and activities made discipleship a priority. Vital small congregations exhibit the same priority on disciple making activities.

C. Peter Wagner and Richard L. Gorsuch rank increasing biblical knowledge as the highest priority for measuring church quality (31). Further, they say, “Church members are increasing in their grasp of the teachings of the Bible. They can integrate this with a theological system that enables them to apply the Bible’s teachings to their life situations” (29). An increase in biblical knowledge, when applied individually and corporately, yields renewal as groups of people within a congregation come to understand more fully the tenets of the faith and are able to hear the God’s call upon their lives.

Warren offers a holistic discipleship model of assimilation. He begins with a

desire to attract non-Christians to the activities and services of Saddleback Community Church. The purpose of this attraction is to facilitate nonbelievers to move to the point where they can make a personal decision to receive Jesus Christ as savior. Next, church leaders encourage attendees to engage in a process of discipleship leading to their membership in Saddleback. Warren observes, “Discipleship is the process of helping people become more like Christ in their thoughts, feelings and actions” (106). As new members, new disciples in Christ should grow not only in their faith but also in their involvement in the ministry of the Church according to individual attendees’ gifts. The discipleship process develops mature members. Saddleback’s “ultimate goal of spiritual growth is to become like Jesus” (331). Finally, Saddleback’s discipleship process facilitates mature members discovery and use of their gifts in ministry.

Macchia describes the necessity of discipleship for a healthy congregation. He says, “The healthy church provides training, models and resources for members of all ages to develop their daily spiritual disciplines” (59). Vital churches teach and create opportunities to develop personal spiritual discipline not to go through the motions of devotion but instead to “rehire the Keeper of my inner spring, my soul and invite him to clear away the debris that settles within me so that what flows out is lovely spring water” (60). Discipleship is not a program but a means for members of vital churches to stay personally in touch with God. As such, discipleship serves to further the process of renewal.

The development of small groups comprises a significant element to corporate renewal and discipleship. Accordingly, Schwarz’s sixth quality characteristic is “holistic small groups” (32). Macchia offers “learning and growing in community” as his fourth

characteristic of church health (77). Saddleback Community Church encourages every new member to become a part of a small group (Warren 325). Galloway's eighth characteristic of a relevant church suggests that people within the church make "connections through small groups" (37). Crandall attributes a vital small group ministry as one key area contributing to congregational renewal (44). He states, "In the course of almost a year together, those who engage in this type of focused fellowship find themselves deeply renewed in their love for one another and for the divine vision given through the pages of scripture" (55). Patton, while leading his congregation through the type of renewal concerned in this research, found that growth groups were absolutely necessary in order to assimilate and disciple the new converts that were coming to his congregation (81). The fact is that every model for church transition, renewal, health, vitality, and strength links corporate renewal to the development of small groups.

One of the possible strengths of the small congregation centers on the small church's potential small group ministry. A personal conversation I had with the church board secretary of my church spawned further reflection on this point. In 2005, the Ryot Church of the Nazarene participated in a 40 Days of Purpose campaign as a tool for corporate renewal. As that campaign ended, we discussed potential small groups. The secretary said, "Pastor Art, we already have a number of small groups operating. Our Sunday school classes can function as a small group. Our teen study can function as a small group. Our Bible studies can function as a small group. We already have small groups" (Miller). Many of the ministries already operational in the church had a small group component.

Callahan seems to support the preceding idea: "[O]ne of the significant qualities

of small, strong congregations is that people discover a deep sense of community” (*Small Strong Congregations* 92). Further, Callahan says that the “congregation lives a healthy life as one, or three or more groupings” (92). Small, strong churches do, or can, have vital and transformational small groups and small group ministries. Small churches tend to have more informal small group structures than do larger churches. Small churches “think in *informal, family terms* [original emphasis], not formal membership terms” (95). Understanding the informal nature to relationships in the smaller congregation is part of the key to understanding small groups in small congregations. Small groups in small churches do not necessarily resemble small groups in medium to large church structures; instead, they are often informal. Still, the sense of ownership, accountability, and growth may be stronger because of the family-like ties within a small congregation.

Conceptual Renewal

A crucial component for churches experiencing a transition from plateau or decline concerns a conceptual renewal in terms of vision and identity. Unhealthy churches often function from inadequate vision and ecclesiology. Through conceptual renewal, “God gives a new vision of what the church can and should be” (Crandall 43). New vision is critical to the renewal that occurs in vital congregations.

The story of Nehemiah offers a biblical account of renewal. Nehemiah, the captive cup bearer for King Artaxerxes, saw the destruction of the city of God and the destitution of his people and grieved over the dismal prospects for their future. After Nehemiah prayed for days following this experience, God kindled a vision of what could be in Judah. God gave Nehemiah a vision of a rebuilt city, a glory rather than a laughingstock. A vision that was greater than his efforts forced Nehemiah to rely upon

God's strength and power to open the door for the vision's fulfillment. As such, the vision became the compelling factor in Nehemiah's life and the passion that drove him. Nehemiah's conviction that God would accomplish this vision through him is evidenced by the following statement: "The God of heaven will give us success; therefore we His servants will arise and build" (Neh. 2:20).

Had Nehemiah focused on his immense task in light of the earthly resources available, he certainly would have been defeated. Nevertheless, the new vision (a God vision) of the city's potential through *God's providence* became the energizing force behind a great renewal and spiritual revival. Appropriation of the vision God shared for the city and his people served as a key component of the revival led by Ezra and Nehemiah.

Describing the transformational cycle, Quinn establishes vision as the second compelling step in effecting deep change (169). Awareness of stagnation and creation of desire to move ahead births such visions. A vision for a preferred future must arise and be pursued from the dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs. Quinn makes a bold statement at this point: "To remain healthy and vibrant, a system must continuously circulate through the transformational cycle" (168). Vital congregations can never be satisfied with the current state of renewal. These congregations constantly pursue renewal.

Herrington, Bonem, and Furr define vision as "a clear, shared, and compelling picture of the preferred future to which God is calling that congregation" (50). Dan Ketchum, General Nazarene Missions International Director, observes, "Vision [is] the God-given faith-ability, to see something with clarity even before it becomes reality and

to advance with integrity toward that goal.” In the same way that good to great companies understood their Hedgehog Concept and breakout churches discerned their Vision Intersection Profile, a key to transformation is a conceptual renewal of the discernment of God’s vision for the future. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr emphasize, “If we will keep focusing on our relationship with God and his purposes for the church, we will be going in the right direction” (27). Members of small congregations who pursue God and his mission for the church possess a dynamic vision for ministry in their community.

David Nixon emphasizes the importance of vision as he recounts the story of his comeback church. He states, “I saw great potential and I didn’t want to settle back into the status quo.... I reiterated my conviction: ‘I want our church to grow’” (14). The power of this statement comes later after a difficult time of transition and pursuit of the vision that God gave him. Nearly two years after the encounter that spawned this quote, the church honored Pastor Nixon during Pastors Appreciation Sunday. Leaders of the church reiterated the same sentiment: “We’re behind you, Pastor. We know the vision for growth that God has given you. We support you and are ready to pull together to see what God will do for us” (15). Nixon communicated a clear vision that God gave to the church. The leadership appreciated the vision that Nixon had communicated. In turn, the church appropriated God’s vision as their own vision.

Renewal of vision becomes the guiding principle for leading and facilitating transformation. Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson assert, “Vision informs others what they are exchanging their lives and time for. Vision is like the North Star—a point of reference that guides and directs but is not necessarily a destination” (147). Vision serves to unify a congregation to mission. Peter M. Senge comments, “Visions are exhilarating. They

create spark, the excitement that lifts an organization out of the mundane” (208). The vision that is communicated provides a point toward which all members are progressing. Vision provides energy to the congregation.

Transition of a struggling small church into a vital, great small church demands vision renewal rather than adoption of a bigger is better vision. The small church must appropriate a transformation vision in order to have a new identity. The small congregation must possess the understanding that “you are called of God—if you know that your ultimate authority and the final validation of your ministry come from the faithful service and celebration of the Word and its confrontation by God’s people, your servanthood will continue to be blessed” (Pfeiffer 69). Faithfulness to God’s vision and mission defines the success of the Church.

Structural Renewal

In many small congregations, the structural framework in operation no longer supports valid ministry in the current context. Renewing the small church’s structure refers to finding new vessels, methods, and forms in order to live out the message of Jesus Christ in this present age (Crandall 43). Pappas emphasizes the necessity of a fluid, dynamic structure that adapts to the small church’s needs and situations. He says, “The small church is not essentially structure; it is essentially process. It is alive. It grows and shares and moves through events and the flow and sequence of life” (17). The ministry structure of a vital congregation serves to enhance ministry. The structure employed must match the situation, context, and ability of the local church.

While the current ministries and structures may have brought growth and vitality, culture changes often render structures obsolete and irrelevant to the current situation’s

demands. Forms, methodologies, practices, and “structures that insulate us from the fresh fire of the Spirit should be modified or retired” (Crandall 43). Sanchez echoes this statement when he observes that inadequate structure and planning is one of the significant limiting factors in small congregations (366). Structures that worked in the past but are irrelevant to the current reality frequently cripple small churches.

For renewal to come to small churches, the structures that brought them life must adapt to be relevant to the church’s current reality. Structure involves the way in which parts of the church relate to one another (Schwarz 29). The challenge of dynamic and vital ministry understands how to transform the ministry structure in order to facilitate that ministry. Leaders should identify structural changes needed to implement new ideas (Nelson and Appel 55). Sanchez observes, “As a church grows, it finds itself with the necessity of developing a more elaborate structure and of planning its activities with more precision” (366). The vital small church develops its ministry structure to meet new challenges in the same way that the human body adapts to the changing environment around it.

Madsen identifies a primary weaknesses of a small church as inadequate program through which people’s needs are not met (19). When a local congregation does not understand and respond to the community’s needs, the congregation needs transformation of its ministry structure. The means need to be put into place in order for the congregation’s members and ministers to identify needs and then respond to those needs.

Renewing the congregational structures is a valid and healthy response to the barrier traditionalism creates for the church. Describing the barrier that traditionalism places upon small churches, Pappas observes, “Traditionalism dictates that nothing can

change. Things must stay the way they are. Traditionalism compulsively holds onto the forms of the past while forgetting or ignoring the dynamic spirit that constructed those forms” (102). Structural transformation in the small church looks backwards at the shared history and purpose for the structure, looks forward to apply that purpose to the modern setting, and then creates the means to reproduce an historical purpose in that setting.

A vital church will have dynamic structures in place responding to the perceived and recognized needs of the community. The purpose of structure, methodology, and systems is to “mobilize people to accomplish the tasks we’re called to do” (Macchia 35). Healthy churches create streamlined systems that enable the membership to accomplish the ministry and purposes of the church (36).

Regarding structure and programming, Cushman’s fourth stage in the revitalization process of a church is to “learn to plan programs effectively” (83). In order for churches to minister effectively, they must plan and provide for their ministry. Two reasons may exist for programming failures in the small church: the planning is done by and for the pastor, or the process does not account for the church’s present ministry reality (83).

As a means of moving from plateau or decline, Schaller advocates that churches act their size (*44 Steps* 32). By *acting their size*, a church naturally will grow to its structure’s limits, a concern developed by Schwarz. Natural Church Development suggests a positive correlation between church health and life-giving church structures (29). The biotic principle illustrates the significance of individual parts that these parts integrate into the whole. As such, the system is more important than any one component (66). Stated simply, a church will rise only to the level of its lowest quality characteristic

and no more.

Brian D. McLaren offers the following principles regarding a new ecclesiology or structure for doing church in the new age:

1) Whenever good people (who previously got along well and loved one another warmly) start fighting and acting badly, it is probably a sign that the structure is no longer adequate. 2) A structure that works tends to promote growth, which will eventually make the structure obsolete. 3) Every trade-up in structure requires someone to give up power or freedom, which in turn entails pain and requires grace and humility. 4) Rather than making organization obsolete or superfluous, the Holy Spirit is our resource and guide in how to use, discard, replace and reengineer structures. 5) The Bible, rather than imposing one perfect structure, presents a variety of structures through which God works at various times, according to the needs of the moment. 6) The Bible further calls us to seek wisdom, which is another term for “the ability to decide when structures should be preserved and protected, and when they should be adapted or replaced. 7) Smaller churches ... should pay attention and humbly learn from their larger sibling’s mistakes, struggles and successes. 8) Every newly forming church should probably plan on restructuring every time it doubles in size. 9) It will often be the case that structures are like cocoons or wombs: They must be left behind before the next stage of development can begin. 10) A healthy church must balance the need to conserve expertise with the need for fresh blood and new ideas.... 14) Control is less important than catalyzing positive action. 15) We need an ecclesiology that acknowledges latent periods without guilt. 16) We need an ecclesiology that is streamlined, simple, and less exhausting and time consuming. (101-06)

Throughout McLaren’s summary of characteristics of church structure, he refers to

Herrington, Bonem, and Furr’s transitional principle of spiritual and relational vitality.

The adaptation of structure to meet the congregation’s ministry needs and a community’s needs takes a special relationship with God. Recognizing God as the preeminent leader of the congregation and the vital interpersonal relationship exhibited within the church provided the catalyst for the healthy transformation of the church.

Pastoral Leadership

That leadership plays a significant role in healthy transition cannot be

overemphasized. Callahan's fifth key for strong congregation's is strong pastoral leadership (*Twelve Keys* 41). Often the pastor serves as the congregation's visionary leader. As such, the pastor creates and communicates vision with the leadership team and congregation by preaching, teaching, and counseling through the transformation and renewal. Small churches look especially to their pastors for the direction that transformation will take.

Given the small church's strong community nature and ties, pastoring a small congregation takes time and patience. Many small churches have seen pastors come and go and subsequently often suffer from vision fatigue. Becoming the pastor of a small church involves several stages:

First is a stage of building and solidifying relationships, and general community acceptance. In general, the entire process seems to take between six to ten years. Second is the stage of fulfillment of pastoral functions. The pastor is accepted by most of the people as counselor, this is a sure indication that the pastor is accepted and trusted. Finally there is the stage of full community participant. This is the point where the pastor is considered as much a part of the local community as everyone else is. (Cushman 91-92)

The pastors of vital congregations frequently experience long tenure. Such tenure is necessary to overcome the various obstacles to transformation. The relational nature of the small church mandates longer tenures. Strong, trusting relationships take time to develop.

Building and cultivating relationships is a key skill for a small church pastor. Nonetheless, small churches do not necessarily desire pastors who are polished and educated and who possesses superior skill. Most commonly, small churches are looking for a pastor who loves them and involves themselves in their lives. Sanchez describes the nature of the pastor/congregation relationship in the small church, "The members of

small churches have the blessing of experiencing an in-depth fellowship with their pastor” (363). Professional pastors who preach well but stay quarantined in their studies frequently frustrate laypeople in small churches. These laypeople desire, as their first priority, a personal relationship with their pastors (Dudley, *Effective Small Churches* 80).

Identifying the primary skill of a small church pastor in terms of relationships, Dudley explains “The small church wants a pastor who is identified as a lover” (*Effective Small Churches* 80). Accordingly, the pastor of a small church must know and be known by the congregation and the congregation must know that their pastor cares for them and loves them. They need to see the pastor’s love lived out verbally and must be illustrated with his or her presence in the lives of the congregation. Dudley emphasizes this fact: “He or she is the tangible symbol of love, the lover” (80). Pastors of transforming churches are much more likely to overcome the obstacles to transformation by loving and understanding the congregation than by leadership, direction, planning, or other pastoral leadership skills (Crandall 138).

Pastors of churches undergoing or needing to undergo deep transition exhibit patient persistence in moving the church forward. Breakout pastors reflect three characteristics of the leadership necessary for deep transformation:

- they desired to communicate clearly their love for the members of the congregation
- they recognized that the established church is often entrenched in tradition and therefore change is difficult and takes time
- they knew that change must ultimately take place and that goals must be achieved if the church is to move forward. (Rainer 47)

Transformational pastors possess a determination that refuses to give up. The commitment necessary to facilitate transition is described by Barna: “The people must be prepared for the arduous and taxing task of restoring faith in each other and of revising

the public's perceptions of the congregation" (83).

Galloway states, "Church health and growth begin with vision" (28). Rainer echoes the importance of vision to breakout churches: "Breakout church leaders accept responsibility and see God's possibilities in even difficult situations" (62). Vision is a key component and skill necessary for transformational pastoral leadership. Vision requires an ability to see God's will and desire for a church in the face of the current reality and challenge. The importance of vision in the transformation of the small church is that "[v]ision informs others what they are exchanging their lives and time for" (Rusaw and Swanson 147). Herrington, Bonem and Furr believe, "Vision describes the big picture of where the church is going, and vision path begins to fill in the details of how the church will get there" (51). Vision creates the urgency that drives transformation conceiving that circumstances can change. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr state, "[T]he most effective ministers have strong leadership skills, including the ability to discern and build commitment around a vision" (51). The pastor of a transformational church must receive his or her vision from God and communicate that vision continuously and passionately to the congregation.

The pastor's ability to bring constructive change requires patient relational functioning (Ramsden 12). Members of the clergy frequently discuss the issue of pastoral tenure. Short tenures are generally an accepted fact in small churches. Transformation presents difficult issues that require perseverance. Commonly pastors of the breakout churches "stayed with a church during the difficult times even though there may be numerous temptations to move to a greener pasture" (Rainer 37). Lengthened tenure enabled breakout pastors to overcome the difficulties faced by plateaued congregations.

Research continues to show effectively pastoring a small church requires a significant time commitment. Pappas lists a unifying characteristic of many unusually effective ministers: “[T]hey currently serve or in the past have served, the same small congregation for many years—often a decade or more. Effective pastors of small churches are willing and able to persist in ministry” (33). Pastoral tenure remains one of the most significant issues in transforming small congregations. While a longer tenure contributes to transition, “[l]ong pastoral tenure is not a panacea or the single answer to struggling churches across America, but I believe that long tenure is *one* [original emphasis] of the key requisites for churches to move from mediocrity to goodness and greatness” (Rainer 58). Longer pastoral tenures facilitate dealing with congregational dysfunctions in a much more healthy fashion.

Missional Renewal

Perhaps small congregations need to be renewed and transformed in their sense of mission and purpose more than anything else. As has been previously stated, many small congregations possess a mission to continue their existence at the current level or to survive. Small churches need to recover a vital sense of purpose and mission. Madsen observes the true nature of the Christian church: “The joy of the Christian church is faithfulness in mission. To set a goal and move toward that goal [faithfulness] is the highest victory in the Christian life” (28). For a congregation to be truly effective (and transformed) it must be able to answer the question, “Why are we here?” (Patton 59), in a positive mission-related way. “A church needing renewal is focused inward. A renewed church focuses outward to mission and service in the world.... Sometimes renewal actually begins here” (Crandall 43).

A myth exists in the world where the small church lives. This myth is not perpetuated by the small church but by those outside it. The myth states that small churches cannot, will not, or do not do missions (Pappas and Planting 3). Small churches *do mission*; they just do not do missions in the same way that large churches accomplish missions. Personal mission efforts that are related to the past story of the church, and efforts seeking to fill need gaps in their world characterize the small church's missional efforts (10-12). Pappas and Planting offer, "By its very nature, [mission in the small church] is organic, integral, and responsive" (12). In discussing missional renewal in the small church, missions must be building upon the shared identity of the congregation in a relational endeavor unique to that congregation.

The key to missional renewal in the small congregation is facilitating that congregation's focus outward to the community and world around it. The small church is poised uniquely to meet needs within the community and world; its mission is to focus on those needs. The vital small congregation seeks to meet some of these needs in creatively. One church described the following roadmap on their journey to becoming externally focused:

- 1) We decided to broaden our outreach focus;
- 2) We decided not to create something that already exists;
- 3) We decided to open our doors to other community organizations;
- 4) We decided that to love and serve our community, we must know our community;
- 5) We decided to jump into the stream!;
- 6) We decided to be open to innovative ideas and partnerships. (Rusaw and Swanson 35-48)

The process of becoming externally focused resulted in renewal in the thinking, focus, and mission of the church.

Barna reports pastors of churches that turn around from plateau or decline "planted an outward-looking perspective in the minds and hearts of the people"

(*Turnaround Churches* 85). Shifting the focus of the people from themselves and their perceived problems was a precursor for focusing on real ministry and turnaround (*Turnaround Churches* 85). Outward-focusing churches receive and understand the mission God has laid before them. Spiritual vitality helps them to become aware of the Holy Spirit's leading to achieve their mission. Patton states the importance of God's vision: "If we do not have a vision for God's work in this place, how can we survive, let alone thrive" (Patton 60).

Significantly, missional renewal in small churches must be accomplished at personal and relational levels. Small churches often do not respond well to programmatic missions; nevertheless, small churches do respond extremely well to needs they perceive that they can meet. Ramsden describes the missional involvement in small churches: "Sending is not done well in small churches when it is approached through bureaucratic or systemic means, by the record of response is clear and positive in both giving and service when the needs are seen personally" (11). Small churches can focus outwardly when they identify needs that speak to the hearts of that group of people.

As a family community, the small congregation cares and responds well to personal needs. The smaller church functions at a more personal, one-to-one level than does the larger congregation. Ramsden further observes, "The supportive quality of the church, especially when it is closely integrated into the community, makes possible a strong outreach ministry through the personal involvements of members in the community" (11). The smaller church understands, perhaps more fully than a larger congregation, that "whatever it does to plant and nurture the fruit of the spirit in daily life is mission" (Johnson 373).

The small church should exhibit concern for lost people in its community and in the world at large. As such, the small church should believe God can convert and redeem people of the present generation and bring them into the congregational fellowship (Pfeiffer 70). Johnson aptly summarizes the need and task of missional renewal in the smaller congregation:

But for a true healthy sense of mission the small church has to be willing to move forward from the good things of its past and accept their role in the present and the future. An effective mission response is an extension of who they are, rather than a prescription from the outside which they are to ingest according to a predetermined plan. (373)

Vital congregations experience a renewal of mission on an ongoing basis. Missional renewal seeks to meet the needs of the community in which the church exists as well as the needs of the word.

Denominational Barriers to Renewal

Ramsden identifies denominational structure as a significant barrier to small church health and vitality: “The other point of consensus in the literature, even in some denominational papers, is that the denominational operation has tended to interfere with the capacity of the small churches for mission and ministry” (12). Small churches within a denominational structure are expected to meet significant demands and programs. Further, these churches have financial obligations assigned to them comprising a significant portion of the annual budgets of these churches. These expectations create a burden on the already inadequate resources of a smaller church.

Further complicating the burden that denominational structures place on smaller congregations is the reality that “[t]hose who write (often large-church pastors, seminary professors, and denominational officials) tend to live in a world different from their small

church brothers and sisters. Thus their thoughts on church renewal, faithfulness, and health are foreign to a small-church person” (Pappas 26). Many of the hierarchy in denominational structures have lost touch with the reality faced by smaller congregations.

Denominational structure can assist small churches and “join with its small congregations to help them gain an accurate picture of the situation that they are in. Such a shared perception enables both the denomination and the congregation to deal with reality in their planning” (Walrath 13). The interaction between the denominational structure and the small congregation is beneficial to both parties. Small congregations confront by the reality and facts of their situations and resources.

Further, denominations can assist smaller churches by “helping them find *suitable* [original emphases] and *capable* [original emphases] pastors and make it possible for these pastors to stay at least *ten years* [original emphases]” (Walrath 15). When denominational structures understand the unique needs, personalities, and ecclesiologies of small churches, these structures can use their resources and networks to match congregations to pastors rather than merely placing a warm body in a struggling church. By assisting small congregations in this way, denominational structures create a greater likelihood that the pastor/congregation match will be successful.

Ramsden adequately summarizes the small church’s needs from its denominational hierarchy. The small church needs a denominational structure that serves the church rather than the reverse. A small church needs a denominational structure and hierarchy that understands that small churches can be vital again and are significant in their sphere of influence. The small church needs a structure to assist it in finding a competent pastor to lead transformation and to fit relationally with that congregation. A

denominational structure that will identify and encourage partnerships that are mutually strengthening will greatly benefit the smaller congregation. Finally, the denominational structure cannot mass produce programs for transforming the small church but provide materials, training, and organizational suggestions that fit the culture and reality and energize that church for mission in its world (12).

Summary

This study intended to show that the small church is a unique creation called by God to accomplish his purposes in a unique setting. Interestingly, during the 1990s smaller churches in the Church of the Nazarene tended to add more new Nazarenes per one thousand worshipers than did larger churches (Crow 12). Moreover, these small congregations truly can be great churches. While small churches probably will never have the number of congregants of a megachurch, smaller congregations have many benefits that megachurches never will.

Numbers, finances, or fancy ministries cannot measure a small congregation's success. These measures of success are not the biblical measures of success. The most adequate indicator of a great small church is its faithfulness to its God-given mission and purpose. A great small church participates in God's calling to be salt and light in its world. A great small church reaches out into the community and world in which the church resides, offers the good news of the gospel in tangible ways, and loves those people into a relationship with God and with them. Small churches can become great given resources, love, and time.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Small churches account for the majority of all Protestant churches in America today. More than any other size category, small churches comprise the Church of the Nazarene. As such, the small congregation exists as a vital part of the ecclesiastical structure. Many local church members, pastors, and denominational leaders view the small church as incomplete versions of the larger congregations they *should* become rather than as the essential parts of the kingdom they are.

Small churches can and must become vital tools to advance the body of Christ in the new millennium. The new generation hungers for the relational vitality offered by a vital small congregation. Relational vitality can provide the primary vehicle for passionate and dynamic spirituality. Spiritual and relational vitality characterize the renewal of the small congregation.

During the current generation, small churches have struggled in relationship to larger churches. Large churches and megachurches have dominated the imagination and efforts of the church world at the end of the twentieth century. Throughout history, the house church and the small church have been the expressions of the body of Christ in the world. The house church is the New Testament expression of the body of Christ. Recent developments in culture seem to be causing a return to prominence of the house church. The challenge for many small churches today is to become vital, life-giving, missional, and dynamic bodies of Christ in their respective communities and in the world. In order for small churches to recover their God-ordained place in the church culture, church leaders must understand the nature of this transition and the principles behind developing

vital small congregations.

The purpose of this study was to identify transition characteristics of vital small Nazarene churches.

Research Questions

Three questions guided and focused this study.

Research Question 1

What are the transition characteristics of the identified churches? The purpose of this research was to understand more fully, what differentiates churches that are experiencing renewed vitality from those that are stagnant or are slowly dying. This research sought to understand the transition characteristics that are common to the renewed churches. To identify these characteristics, I used three tools to identify common characteristics of each congregation's transition. First, I gave a survey that the pastor completed. The pastor's questionnaire requested data regarding contextual factors at work in the identified church: age breakdown of the congregation, the age and relative size of the facilities, lay-ministry involvement; congregational involvement in discipleship developing activities, the number of congregants called to ministry and equipped for ministry, and, the composite ministry index of the congregation.

The contextual information served two purposes. First it confirmed the transition status of the studied congregation. By comparing the number of conversions, laypeople called to ministry, baptisms, and laypeople trained and disciplined, I hoped to see a clear difference between renewed and stalled churches. The second purpose of the contextual material was to eliminate the growth pattern of the community in which the church existed as an intervening variable.

The second questionnaire was a researcher-designed questionnaire that explored six components of renewal and transition. Six sets of ten questions each explored the congregation's renewal process: personal renewal, corporate renewal, conceptual renewal, structural renewal, missional renewal, and the renewal of lay leadership. The survey presented these questions randomly.

The third tool was a semi-guided interview led by the researcher on-site. The interview explored the congregation's history and transformation as well as the validity of the responses to the written surveys. Further, I explored principles behind the transformation of that congregation that the surveys did not identify. I developed separate interview schedules for interviewing the pastoral staff and the key lay leadership. I tape recorded the interviews, and my secretary, Jill Gordon, transcribed those sessions. Two individuals from my Research Reflection Team coded the responses for analysis by the Research Reflection Team. I designed the semi guided interview in order to understand the factors behind the transition process that may not appear through the survey process. The onsite interview also enabled me to explore more deeply the process of transition with those who were the major characters in the transition.

Research Question 2

What is the significance and role of the pastoral leadership in the transition? I designed this question for the on-site interviews in order to understand the relationship between the pastoral leader and the transformation. My Research Reflection Team and I identified key leadership characteristics through responses to the interview questions. I asked the pastor and the lay leadership team questions regarding the pastor's personality and leadership. These questions measured the relative leadership level of the transition

leader in terms of Rainer's Acts 6/7 leadership continuum.

Research Question 3

What are the elements operative behind the identified churches' transition to vitality? A major premise behind this research assumed a positive correlation between spiritual vitality and a transition of the congregation to renewed vitality. The primary index for congregational vitality is the development of the biblical marks of the church in greater measure. These biblical marks include unity, holiness, catholicity, apostolicity and word-and-sacrament. The questionnaire responses and the on-site interviews measured the responses indicating the presence of the biblical marks of the church.

Participants

The population and sample for this study included Churches of the Nazarene averaging one-hundred or fewer regular attendees prior to the identified transition point. I chose churches within two-hundred miles of my home in south-central Pennsylvania. The district superintendents of the eight districts within a two-hundred mile radius identified the sample churches. The population of this area included major metropolitan areas, suburban congregations, medium-sized cities, small towns, and rural villages.

Identification of the research subjects was accomplished through an introductory letter explaining the scope and focus of the study and provided the identification criteria. Two weeks after I sent the letter, if I received no response, I made a follow-up telephone call to the district superintendent. Six transition churches and three control congregations were studied. After the initial surveys were returned, I analyzed and compared the Composite Ministry Index figures provided for me by the pastors of the study group churches as well as the control group churches. I noted the relative differences between

the control and study groups. The provided CMI identified churches that were touching significantly more lives outside the walls of the church than attended regular weekly worship services.

Instrumentation

This project was an evaluative study in the descriptive mode using researcher-designed questionnaires and semi-guided interviews to identify the principles underlying historical transformation. I conducted a multisite case study in order to accomplish this research.

I identified sites for individual case studies by contacting individual district superintendents with a letter explaining the purpose and scope of the study. After I sent a letter of introduction to the pastor of the identified congregation, and after making a follow-up telephone call to explain the purpose and method of the study, I sent researcher-designed questionnaires to the identified churches.

Composite Ministry Index

To support a church as a study congregation, I evaluated a church's Composite Ministry Index (CMI). Identified churches whose CMI was greater than twice its morning worship attendance average were included as members of the study grouping. The CMI is reported on the initial pastor's survey. The Composite Ministry Index is a numerical figure invented by Mid-Atlantic District Superintendent Dr. Kenneth Mills. The composite ministry index measures new believers in contrast to transfer members in order to evaluate the disciple-making involvement of the congregation. The CMI reports number of people called, trained, and involved in ministry (both lay and professional) and the degree to which the church is lay driven. The involvement of the church in off-site

ministries measured the missional focus of the church. The composite ministry index is an attempt to reveal the faithfulness of a congregation to its outward focus. A church with a high composite ministry index ministers beyond its own four walls. The CMI figure indicates a church's relative ministry impact in its context. Table 3.1 indicates the statistical figures used to generate the composite ministry index for a specific congregation.

Table 3.1. Composite Ministry Index

Ministry Category	Ministry Total
New Believers (non-transfer)	_____
Number of persons called and trained in ministry	_____
Number of persons intentionally involved in discipleship	_____
Number of persons actively and regularly involved in the ministry of the local congregation	_____
Sunday morning worship attendance	_____
Sunday school attendance	_____
Mid-week service attendance	_____
Small group attendance	_____
Compassionate ministries (Soup kitchen, clothing, etc.)	_____
Radio and television outreach	_____
Day Care or Preschool programs	_____
Off-campus services (Nursing homes, prison etc.)	_____
Non-traditional outreach (not previously defined)	_____
Composite Ministry Index	(Sum of all Figures)

The second element of instrumentation was a researcher-designed questionnaire (see Appendix A). Current church board members, board members sitting at the time of the transition, *unofficial* leaders and all pastoral staff members were asked to fill out the

questionnaire. I designed this questionnaire to measure the relative degree of renewal that a congregation has experienced in six major categories of vitality. These categories of renewal are personal, corporate, conceptual, structural, and missional. *Personal renewal* measures an individual's growth, transformation, and ongoing spiritual maturation. *Corporate renewal* measures a church's transformation in terms of worship, passion for a personal experience of God, interpersonal relationships, and discipleship. *Conceptual renewal* measures the revitalization of how a church understands its purpose and vision and how that purpose governs the activities and organization of that church. *Structural renewal* measures how a church's ministry structures and ministries advance its purpose and how those structures minister to the community at large. *Missional renewal* evaluates the church's outward focus and involvement in practical, hands-on ministries that are designed to bless the community in which the congregation ministers. Finally, *lay-leadership renewal* evaluates the level of training and involvement of the laity in the leadership of the congregation and their active involvement in gift-based ministries. Dr. Revennaugh and Dr. Hegede computed and analyzed the results of the survey.

To ensure that the findings of the survey were valid and unique to vital small churches, I chose three small churches as a control group to test the survey. These churches were located in Alum Bank, Pennsylvania (the church that I pastor), Cumberland, Maryland, and Baltimore, Maryland. I included these churches based on their community demographic. The Ryot Church is a rural, regional congregation. Cumberland First Church is located in a small city in Western Maryland. The Dundalk Church is located in the Metro-Baltimore, Maryland, area. These churches completed the researcher-designed questionnaire. The results were included in the analysis of the

surveys.

I conducted a pilot test of the initial instrument in two churches to evaluate its validity. I conducted initial pilot tests in three churches: Ryot, Cumberland First, and The United Church of Schellsburg. Dr. Revenaugh analyzed the results of the pilot test. The participants in the pilot test indicated that some of the language used in the survey was confusing and unclear in meaning. The language used in the survey did not translate across the denominational barrier between the Nazarene churches and the United Church of Christ (UCC) Church. Therefore, I did not tabulate the results from the United Church of Schellsburg.

The pilot test exposed a further weakness in design in that it did not separate the results well. In consultation with Dr. Revenaugh, we determined that a five-point Likert did not provide adequate differentiation in response patterns. In order to fix the identified weakness in the scale, I modified the scale to include seven points. Additionally, the pilot test exposed a mood-bias weakness in the survey. In each category, the questions were revised so that five were stated positively and five were stated negatively. Changing the phraseology of the questions eliminated mood bias in the responses.

The third component of instrumentation was two on-site semi-guided interviews. One interview was with the pastor and one interview was with the church board and significant leaders. The pastors of the local churches in the study group invited the leaders of the congregation to the interview. I gave instructions to the pastor to include in the interviews the current elected leaders, elected leaders who were in office during the transition, and those informal leaders whom he considered significant to the transition. The structure of the interview was semi-guided. The semi-guided interview explored the

identified characteristics of the transition and any unstated principles behind the transition.

I gathered community context and demographics from United States census reports as well as from the introductory questions on the pastors' surveys. I compared the demographics of the individual churches to responses given on the researcher-designed questionnaire. I analyzed these demographics for commonalities and differences that might explain growth or decline.

Variables

The primary variable of this study is small church vitality and its progress towards vitality. I operationalized this variable in terms of new conversions, number of people involved in lay-ministry, and the total number of people involved in intentional discipleship activities. Discipleship activities include small group participation, training in evangelism, ministry training or regular participation in a Sunday school class. The pastors of the study congregations reported this data on the initial survey. These figures collectively indicate a church that is living out its calling to be the body of Christ in a specific location. Further, a church that is reporting good numbers of conversions, significant numbers of laypeople involved in regular ministries and disciple-making activities, and is also seeing members of its fellowship called out into professional ministry is exhibiting the biblical marks of the church: unity, catholicity, apostolicity, and holiness. Further, a church that is exhibiting renewal in these areas engage in passionate worship in which the vital believers can engage the living God.

Other variables that may have affected the outcome of this study included demographics of the communities surrounding the congregations: socioeconomic status

of congregational members, congregational demographic profile, and congregational self-esteem. A further variable was the leadership quotient and tenure of the lead pastor.

Data Collection

A letter seeking to identify small churches that transitioned from plateau or decline to vitality was sent by direct mail to the district superintendents presiding over the churches within two-hundred miles of my home. I followed up the letter with a telephone call to each superintendent two weeks after the direct mailing to gather the responses and identify churches for study. I solicited further assistance from Dr. Dick Wilson, faculty member at Eastern Nazarene College in Wollaston, Massachusetts. In his role for the college, Wilson travels extensively across the eastern region of the Church of the Nazarene and visits a wide variety of Nazarene churches. As such, he has experience with churches that have exhibited the transition that was studied.

After I had identified subjects for study, I sent a letter seeking permission to use that local church as a case study in the transformation pattern and principles to the lead pastor of each local church. To encourage participation, each pastor was promised the results of the research and the freedom to use the identified research to strengthen the vitality of his charge. After the direct mail, I contacted each pastor via telephone to gauge the pastor's interest and availability and to schedule an on-site visit to conduct the case study.

Questionnaire Protocol

I mailed the pre-visit questionnaires directly to the pastors along with instructions regarding the administration of the questionnaires. I included a prepaid envelope to facilitate returning the completed questionnaires to me for tabulation. These instructions

included the following points of protocol:

1. Invited respondents included current church board members, board members at the time of the transition, Sunday school board members both current and past, Sunday school teachers, any informal/unofficial congregational leaders who were a significant part of the transformation, and all staff members, paid and volunteer.

2. Information provided in the form of a brief congregational announcement and a bulletin insert inviting people to participate in the study; and,

3. Instructions provided for the return of all questionnaires including a postage-paid envelope for returning them to me.

The researcher-designed questionnaire contained seventy-three questions designed to understand the renewal process of identified local churches. The first thirteen questions were general demographic questions. This demographic survey precluded one demographic within the congregation from skewing the results of the survey. I organized the remaining sixty questions into the five categories of renewal identified by the literature. Each category contained twelve questions. These categories included personal renewal, corporate renewal, conceptual renewal, structural renewal, and missional renewal. I distributed questions dealing with personal and corporate renewal into several subcategories in order to identify subthemes within the category of renewal. In order to evaluate personal renewal, I designed questions to measure spiritual passion, discipleship, community and relational renewal, and worship. In order to identify the corporate renewal experienced by the congregations better, questions included in the survey were designed to assess prayer emphasis and renewal, renewal of spiritual passion, congregational involvement in discipleship, and renewal of passionate worship.

In the cover letter, I asked the pastors to distribute surveys to all pastoral staff (both paid and volunteer), formally elected church leaders (church board, Sunday school board, ministry committees), as well as informal leaders. I targeted people who were involved in the transition as well as those who would have memory of the church's condition prior to the transition initiative. The interview process of the research relied heavily on the pastor's judgment as to who should complete surveys. A total of eighty-seven surveys were completed and returned. I received no surveys from Owings Mills Latino church. The pastors of the identified churches returned completed surveys to me and then I forwarded the surveys to Dr. Revennaugh for tabulation and analysis.

Interview Protocol

During a one-day visit, I conducted semi-structured interviews with focus groups from the congregational leadership and the pastoral staff. In each case, I conducted the pastoral leadership interview with the lead pastor of the transitioned congregation. In the case of Owings Mills Latino, I conducted the interview with the current lead pastor and the pastor who immediately preceded the current pastor. In the case of the lay leadership interviews, those persons identified by the pastor as key leaders during the transition participated in the interview sessions. An average of fifteen lay leaders was present during the interview sessions. The exception to my protocol was Owings Mills Latino. Two laypeople were interviewed during that session. The laypeople interviewed were the wives of the pastoral leadership. In each lay leadership interview, the pastor was excused from the interview session to prevent intimidation on the part of the lay leaders, or the creation of an unwillingness to respond freely. Ebensburg Lakeside church was the exception to this rule. In that session, the lay leadership asked the pastor to remain

present during the interview.

These interviews were semi-guided and designed to understand the unreported history of the transformation. I recorded the sessions for later reference. Transcripts of each focus group were typed from the tape. Relevant themes, principles, emphases were coded in the transcripts. I distributed transcripts of the interview session to each member of the Research Reflection Team for consideration, analysis, and discussion at the research reflection meetings.

Following the completion of each case study, two members of my Research Reflection Team analyzed and coded the results of the interviews. After coding, the Research Reflection Team discussed the coded results of the interviews. The team took note of commonalities and differences between the separate interview sessions.

Validity and Reliability

I conducted a pilot test of the survey in three separate churches in order to test the validity of the instrument. I forwarded copies of the questionnaires to each lead pastor prior to the pilot test. Dr. Revennaugh processed the results of the survey. Dr. Hegde subjected the raw data to the SAS software analysis and measured the reliability coefficients. Reliability was determined.

Pilot Test

The three churches completing the pilot test were Ryot Church of the Nazarene, Cumberland First Church of the Nazarene, and the United Church of Schellsburg (UCC).

Control Groupings

To insure that the data measured was unique to the transformed congregations, the questionnaire was also completed by three local churches identified as stable or

declining. The control group churches were Cumberland First Nazarene, Dundalk Nazarene, and Ryot Nazarene. Of the churches chosen, one church existed in an urban setting (Dundalk), one church existed in a suburban community (Cumberland First), and one of the control churches existed in a rural community (Ryot).

I wrote the survey with six subsets of questions that measure the church's relative level of renewal according to the six categories of renewal. Each subset consisted of two sets of questions, five questions stated positively and five questions stated negatively (to eliminate mood bias). Dr. Revennaugh entered the raw responses into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Dr. Hegde took the spreadsheet and imported it into the powerful SAS statistical analysis program. SAS computed the results of the survey. The Chronbach's alpha is a measure to estimate internal consistency by determining how all items on a test relate to all other test items and to the total test. The closer the results are to 1.0, the better the reliability. A Chronbach's alpha test was run on all survey items and groupings—one subscale at a time. Chronbach's alpha scores are considered to exhibit a high degree of reliability if the resultant quotient is higher than .70 (Pope). The majority of the Chronbach's alpha figures were .70 and higher. Table 3.2 reports the Chronbach's alpha scores.

Table 3.2. Internal Reliability of Survey Questions

Survey Question Grouping	Chronbach's alpha Score
Personal Renewal (positive)	.767
Personal Renewal (negative)	.606
Corporate Renewal (positive)	.668
Corporate Renewal (negative)	.700
Conceptual Renewal (positive)	.612
Conceptual Renewal (negative)	.705
Structural Renewal (positive)	.679
Structural Renewal (negative)	.702*
Lay Leadership Renewal (positive)	.523*
Lay Leadership Renewal (negative)	.275*
Missional Renewal (positive)	.723
Missional Renewal (negative)	.703

*Corrected figure

Three categories have corrected figures. An analysis of structural renewal negative and both lay leadership categories reported less than reliable Chronbach's alpha scores. In the case of structural renewal negative, excluding question 23 from the analysis increased the Chronbach's alpha score from .382 to .702. The statistician corrected the lay leadership renewal categories by eliminating question 22 from the positive category and questions 16 and 50 from the negative categories. This type of correction is standard in the development of a new research instrument.

I analyzed the correlation structures between the questions in each category and found a high level of correlation among the questions. For example, in the corrected structural negative category, all questions were highly correlated. For example, questions 43 and 61 are highly correlated with a Pearson p -value in the mean values of $<.0001$ with a correlation coefficient of .644 among sixty-eight respondents. Within that same

category, questions 61 and 47 are also highly correlated with a Pearson score of .838. The least correlated questions in the category are questions 61 and 63 with a Pearson coefficient of $-.107$ and a p -value of $.385$. In the personal renewal positive category ($n=69$), the least correlated questions are question 52 with question 25, the Pearson p -value among the means is $.122$ and a coefficient of $.384$. All other Pearson Correlation Coefficient values in the category are less than $.008$. The correlation structures within each category, corrected or otherwise, reveal similar Pearson values. The strong correlation between questions within each category supports the validity and reliability of the instrument.

I treated the mean responses of the survey data to scrutiny according to three categories of respondents. The first treatment of the data was according to research grouping, that is, the control group or study group. The second treatment of the data was according to gender differences. The final treatment was according to the reported church experience of the respondent, either high or low. Providing the results of this data served to eliminate either experience or gender as intervening variable in the renewal categories identified by the survey.

Data Analysis

Following the completion of the surveys and the return of the data analysis, I analyzed and interpreted the results with the assistance of Dr. Woody Davis and my Research Reflection Team. The Research Reflection Team analyzed and discussed the tabulated results of the questionnaires and the coded transcripts of each on-site visit. I distributed data to the Research Reflection Team prior to each meeting. The Research Reflection Team met nine times to review the data and discuss its implications. The

Research Reflection Team participated in one meeting to analyze the statistical reports and notes.

Triangulation of data among interviews, statistical analysis of the surveys, and the statistical history of one church resulted in the exclusion of that church previously identified as a *transitioned* church. Themes identified by the Research Reflection Team as significant to the transition and common to the transitioned churches were missing in the Gettysburg church. Further, the statistical analysis revealed that in each major statistical category, the Gettysburg church preformed identically to the control churches rather than similarly to the researched churches. Further reason for redefining this church was the fact that although the leaders exhibited a high level of collegiality and unity exhibited within the interview, the church, in fact has been declining numerically for at least three years and its footprint in its community is significantly smaller than it had been previously.

Generalizability

This study was delimited to include congregations within the Church of the Nazarene. These congregations were located within two-hundred miles of my home. The purpose of this study was to find reproducible principles for the transformation of small churches to a state of vitality. Extenuating circumstances in the health of a local church and the vitality of the context of the local congregation are beyond the scope and control of this study. Findings may be applicable to other comparable denominations and churches of similar size. Results of this study are summarized in Chapter 4.

Ethics

In order to ensure that each participant remained anonymous, surveys only

required minimal identifying information. No names were printed. The individual surveys were identified by the church from which it came, the gender of the respondent, the age of the respondent, and the years of experience with the church and leadership position of the respondent. The pastor of the respective study church returned the surveys to me prior to my visit for the interview. Upon completion of the dissertation and its defense, all surveys were destroyed. A Microsoft Excel spreadsheet with the raw results of the surveys is stored in a password-protected file on a storage device in my possession.

Results of the surveys and transcripts of the interviews were seen by my secretary, my statisticians, and my Research Reflection Team. Members of the Research Reflection Team returned printed copies of the interviews upon completion of analysis and electronic copies in their possession were deleted. Electronic copies in my possession are stored in a password-protected file on a storage drive in my possession for further consideration.

At the beginning of each interview session, I obtained verbal permission from each participant as I explained the purpose and focus of the research. Anonymity of the respondents was guaranteed to each person participating in the survey or interview. The only identifiers reported in this research are the names of the church used as a research participant or control.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Small churches in the United States, generally speaking, are stalled or declining. Much of the current literature as well as that of the recent past focuses on small churches growing numerically and becoming larger as a measure of their success and validity. While few small churches ever emerge from a state of stagnation to a renewed state of vitality, a few small churches, against all odds, do transition to a renewed state of vitality. The purpose of this study was to identify transition characteristics of vital small Nazarene churches.

This chapter begins with my description of the overall characteristics of the identified churches participating in this study and concludes with a descriptive presentation of the data collected and analyzed.

Characteristics of Participants in the Study

I gathered basic demographic data from the pastor of each identified church in the study. The purpose of obtaining demographic data was to identify any characteristics of the communities in which the churches were located that might contribute to the overall state of growth. Basic data regarding the communities and the church reported by the pastor was the approximate population living within a twenty minute drive of the church and the general population trend of the community in which the church is located. These figures were compared to recent census data reports for these communities. The pastor's survey also provided the church's Composite Ministry Index. The CMI figure represents an approximate footprint of the congregation's influence within its local community.

I asked for further demographic data from each of the survey respondents. Each of

the seventy-four respondents reported their gender, marital status, amount of time served in the studied church, current involvement in church leadership, and the percentage of total income that they give to their local church. This data, particularly gender and church experience were analyzed against the trends identified between the control and study groups to identify any alternative explanations for the statistical trends identified in the survey.

Community Demographic Trends

Four district superintendents responded to the letters sent to them and identified seven churches as having transitioned from stall or decline to vitality. These communities reflected a wide variety of settings and demographic trends. Table 4.1 summarizes the relative demographic of the communities in which these churches (including control groupings) are located (“Demographics”).

Table 4.1. Community Population Trends of Studied Churches

Community	Population	Identified Trend	Census Trend %
*Alum Bank, PA	< 15,000	Declining	-1.0
*Baltimore, MD	> 500,000	Stable	8.0
*Cumberland, MD	15,000-50,000	Declining	-10
East Palestine, OH	< 15,000	Declining	-6.0
Ebensburg, PA	15,000-50,000	Stable to Growing	2.0
*Gettysburg, PA	100,000-500,000	Growing	7.0
Media, PA	> 500,000	Not identified	-4.0
Owings Mills, MD	50,000-100,000	Growing	34
Pylesville, MD	100,000-500,000	Growing	13
Stratton, OH	15,000-50,000	Declining	-3.0

*control group communities

The demographics between the communities vary little between control groups

and study groups. Identified churches came from declining communities as well as growing communities. These churches exist in rural, urban, and suburban communities. The control churches exist and minister in exactly the same kinds of communities. One control church is located in an urban setting, one is in a small city, and one is rural. One control church ministers in a growing community, one in a declining community, and one in a relatively stable community.

Composite Ministry Index

Pastors were asked to figure their church's relative Composite Ministry Index as a measure of the vitality of the church's impact upon the community in which it ministers. The CMI was the creation of the Mid-Atlantic District Church of the Nazarene. The CMI figure indicates the number of touches inside and outside of the walls of the church each week. The CMI is an index that seeks to help church leaders identify their faithfulness in carrying out the ministry of the church in the world.

Table 4.2. Composite Ministry Index Comparison

Church	Composite Ministry Index	Worship Attendance
*Cumberland (MD) First	197	75
*Dundalk (Baltimore)	300	56
East Palestine (OH)	Not Provided	Not Provided
Fawn Grove (Pylesville, MD)	500	81
Harvest Field Community (Gettysburg, PA)	72	61
Lakeside Community (Ebensburg, PA)	2835	121
Media (PA)	139	63
Owings Mills First Latino (Baltimore, MD)	1200	295
*Ryot (Alum Bank, PA)	300	118
Stratton (OH)	84	36

*Control grouping

Generally speaking, the study churches reported significantly higher composite ministry scores than did the control churches. Three of the study churches' reported CMI figures more than 300 percent higher than the reported worship attendance. Similarly in the control grouping, three indicated a CMI figure 165 percent of reported morning worship attendance or less. Dundalk is an exception to the pattern with a CMI figure 517 percent higher than reported morning worship attendance. The variance in the relationship of the CMI to morning worship attendance may indicate a problem in reporting the CMI or may diminish its value in identifying vitality in its current formulation.

A weakness present in the CMI is that the index measures unrelated figures. For instance, the test measures individuals who attend worship services and those who attend small group sessions of all sorts. It also attempts to quantify persons called and trained for ministry, decisions for Christ, and those involved in leadership of the various ministries of the church. The index also asks for the number of people touched by radio

ministries, television ministries, compassionate ministries, and nursing home services. Some of these numbers can be quantified while others call for speculation. Further, some of the attendances may be repeated in the final CMI figure. While a church's CMI may provide a general feeling for the faithfulness with which a congregation pursues its mission, its value as a research tool may be limited.

Pastoral Tenure and Experience

Each pastor reported both his or her experience in ministry and the number of churches that he or she has pastored. The data indicated no direct correlation between either years of experience or number of pastoral assignments and the transition experienced by the churches identified. I observed no significant differences in either the pastoral tenure or the experience of the pastors leading the respective churches in regards to their experience of transition or vitality.

Table 4.3. Comparison of Pastoral Experience

Church	Years at Current Assignment	Number of Churches Pastored	Total Years in Ministry
*Cumberland First	22	4	33
*Dundalk	2	1	10
East Palestine	2	1	7
Fawn Grove	2	4	16
*Harvest Field Community	1	1	2
Lakeside Community	7	2	13
Media	3	1	13
Owings Mills First Latino	5	2	NA
*Ryot	7	4	19
Stratton, OH	5	1	5

*Control grouping

Quantitative Measures of Research

I conducted this research in two modes, qualitative analysis and quantitative analysis. The researcher-designed research instrument provided quantitative data, which was statistically analyzed using computer software. The qualitative data arises through the semi-guided interviews, the coding of that data and subsequent discussion of the interview transcripts by the Research Reflection Team.

Respondents completed an initial survey to measure and evaluate relative levels of renewal in six key categories: personal, conceptual, corporate, missional, structural, and lay-leadership renewal. I compared mean scores between the study group and control group. We analyzed the mean scores according to gender differences as well as differences in leadership experience and several combinations of these variables. Mean scores at or near 1.0 indicate a high level of perceived renewal while scores at or near 7.0 indicate lower levels of perceived renewal. Table 4.4 reports the mean scores for the control grouping and the study grouping, while corresponding treatment of the survey data according to experience and gender is reported in Table 4.5. I have chosen to define experience in terms of high experience in the church and low experience in the church. Respondents categorized as having high experience are those with greater than ten years of attendance in the church. Respondents categorized as having low experience are those with less than ten years attendance and/or membership in the congregation. I studied the responses according to experience and gender in order to eliminate those categories as intervening variables in the response pattern.

Table 4.4. Mean Values Categorized by Group

	Control n=42		Study n=46	
	M	SD	M	SD
Conceptual renewal	3.53	.47	3.40	.46
Corporate renewal	3.10	.58	3.43	.57
Lay Leadership renewal	3.07	.56	2.96	.66
Missional renewal	3.19	.59	3.20	.63
Personal renewal	3.39	.54	3.50	.58
Structural renewal	3.70	.54	3.66	.57

In general, the study group indicated a higher level of renewal in the categories of corporate renewal, missional renewal, and personal renewal than did the control grouping. The control grouping reported higher perceived levels of renewal in the categories of conceptual renewal, lay leadership renewal, and in structural renewal. The means do not differ greatly between the research groupings. Table 4.5 lists the mean values treated for gender and experience differences. Each of the mean values reflects similar differences when treated for gender and experience. The greatest mean difference between male and female respondents is in the category of conceptual renewal while the greatest mean difference between high and low experience occurs in the category of corporate renewal. We performed MANOVA and ANOVA analysis (results reported later on page) to test the significance of these differences.

Table 4.5. Mean Values Categorized by Gender and Experience

Group	Gender M n=38		Gender F n=50		Exp. High n=55		Exp. Low n=33	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Conceptual renewal	3.57	.47	3.38	.46	3.55	.47	3.32	.44
Corporate renewal	3.29	.55	3.25	.62	3.22	.59	3.36	.59
Lay Leadership renewal	3.14	.64	2.91	.57	3.00	.52	3.02	.74
Missional renewal	3.24	.55	3.17	.66	3.08	.59	3.40	.59
Personal renewal	3.46	.59	3.44	.55	3.44	.57	3.46	.56
Structural renewal	3.77	.53	3.61	.57	3.64	.54	3.75	.58

Drawing from demographic information provided by the respondents in each of the surveys, we analyzed responses according to gender and experience as well as control and study groupings. When comparing gender differences between control and study groupings, in general, study female respondents reported a higher level of renewal than did the control grouping. Responses from male respondents varied in their perceived level of renewal. The males in the study group reported higher levels of renewal in conceptual and structural areas while exhibiting lower levels of renewal in the personal, corporate, missional, and lay-leadership categories. When treating the responses between research groupings according to experience, the control grouping both high and low experience reflect lower levels of renewal than do the similar treatments in the study groups. When examining responses for gender and experience, females report higher levels of renewal than do the males despite relative experience differences. The only deviation to this pattern occurs in the category of missional renewal where males with high experience report higher levels of renewal than do females with high experience and in the level of personal renewal where males with low experience report higher levels of

renewal than do females with low experience. Those females with higher levels of experience within the research group report higher levels of renewal than do those with lower levels of experience. Two-way treatments of mean data are reported in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6 Two-Way Means Comparisons

		Personal Renewal	Corporate Renewal	Conceptual Renewal	Structural Renewal	Missional Renewal	Lay- Leadership Renewal
Total Sample v. Gender	C.F. n= 20	M=3.42 SD=.50	M= 3.16 SD=.67	M=3.51 SD=.42	M=3.67 SD=.49	M=3.25 SD=.64	M=3.06 SD=.52
	C.M. n=22	M=3.35 SD=.58	M=3.05 SD=.48	M=3.55 SD=.52	M=3.72 SD=.60	M=3.13 SD=.55	M=3.07 SD=.59
	S.F. n=30	M=3.44 SD=.58	M=3.32 SD=.59	M=3.30 SD=.47	M=3.57 SD=.61	M=3.11 SD=.67	M=2.81 SD=.58
	S.M. n=16	M=3.61 SD=.57	M=3.62 SD=.46	M=3.58 SD=.41	M=3.83 SD=.45	M=3.37 SD=.54	M=3.25 SD=.73
	C.H. n=27	M=3.44 SD=.52	M= 3.13 SD=.61	M=3.67 SD=.42	M=3.68 SD=.49	M=3.13 SD=.63	M=3.11 SD=.44
	C.L. n= 15	M=3.29 SD=.58	M=3.05 SD=.53	M=3.27 SD=.45	M=3.73 SD=.63	M=3.30 SD=.51	M=2.97 SD=.73
Total Sample v. Experience	S.H. n=28	M=3.44 SD=.62	M=3.30 SD=.57	M=3.44 SD=.49	M=3.59 SD=.59	M=3.02 SD=.56	M=2.90 SD=.59
	S.L. n=18	M=3.61 SD=.53	M=3.63 SD=.52	M=3.36 SD=.44	M=3.78 SD=.55	M=3.48 SD=.66	M=3.06 SD=.77
	F.H. n=33	M=3.40 SD=.52	M= 3.17 SD=.61	M=3.44 SD=.44	M=3.57 SD=.58	M=3.13 SD=.65	M=2.94 SD=.54
	F.L. n=17	M=3.52 SD=.61	M=3.44 SD=.63	M=3.28 SD=.48	M=3.70 SD=.54	M=3.23 SD=.68	M=2.86 SD=.62
Gender v. Experience	M.H. n=22	M=3.50 SD=.64	M=3.30 SD=.55	M=3.72 SD=.48	M=3.74 SD=.46	M=2.99 SD=.50	M=3.14 SD=.49
	M.L. n=16	M=3.41 SD=.52	M=3.29 SD=.56	M=3.35 SD=.39	M=3.81 SD=.63	M=3.57 SD=.44	M=3.18 SD=.83

Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) is an appropriate statistical method to check the significance of differences occurring among all variables between the study group and the control group. I report the significance levels of the differences in the MANOVA testing later. While univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) is an appropriate statistical technique to measure the difference in mean levels individually,

MANOVA tests whether mean differences among groups on a combination of dependent variables is likely to occur by chance. Simply put ANOVA tests for normality among variables as they relate to one another, while MANOVA tests the normality of the group of variables among the various research subjects. MANOVA testing requires multivariate normality of the research variables. I have reported the results of the MANOVA using the Wilks' Lambda test. The multivariate normality test did not pass in the family of research variables; however, MANOVA is a fairly robust statistical procedure that guarded against the failure of multivariate normality in this research. MANOVA results indicate that no interactive effects exist between the subgroups of the research. The MANOVA analysis is sufficiently rigorous to reveal that there was significant difference between the control and the study groups. The MANOVA testing of the mean data supports the differences in the responses between control and study groupings.

Table 4.7 reports the Wilks' Lambda, the f -values, and p -values for each treatment. The Wilks' Lambda scores reveal areas of difference between treatments of research data. A p -value of .05 or less indicates a significant difference in the mean levels between groupings. A higher Wilks' Lambda p -value indicates a lower difference between groupings. For example, the Wilks' p -value for the multivariate treatment of the data according to research grouping (control vs. study) has a p -value of .0232. This p -value indicates a difference in the responses between the two research groups. The difference in the mean p -values also occurs when the mean responses are treated according to experience. The p -value for experience (high vs. low) is .0231. This figure indicates a significant difference in the mean responses according to experience. In summary, I found a significant difference in the treatment of the data according to study

versus control, as well as treatment according to experience, high versus low.

Table 4.7. MANOVA Results

Treatment	Lambda	Wilks' Lambda <i>f</i> -value	Wilks' Lambda <i>p</i> -value
Research Grouping—Control v. Study	.836	2.61	.0232
Gender—Male v. Female	.932	.97	.4510
Experience—High v. Low	.836	.84	.0231
Total Sample v. Gender	.949	.69	.6586
Total Sample v. Experience	.832	2.62	.0230
Gender v. Experience	.867	1.98	.0780

Following MANOVA testing, we analyzed the survey mean responses using univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA). ANOVA testing is a statistical technique to identify the difference in mean levels individually. ANOVA testing analyzes the responses of the individual renewal categories according to the same treatment categories as the MANOVA testing. Whereas MANOVA tests the entire grouping for differences, ANOVA tests the individual categories of the survey. ANOVA requires univariate normality of the research variables. Using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov procedure, we found that the research variables satisfied normality in the log-transformed scale. Therefore, we performed ANOVA analysis to log-transformed mean levels. The *F*-test *p*-value identifies statistical differences in the mean values. An *F*-test *p*-value score of .05 or less is considered to indicate statistical differences between the treatments. Higher scores, closer to 1.0 for example, indicate lesser differences between the treatments. ANOVA testing values are reported in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8. ANOVA Values for Log-Transformed Data

N=74	One-Way ANOVA <i>F</i> -Test <i>p</i> -Values		
	Research	Gender	Experience
Personal Renewal	.758	.429	.159
Corporate Renewal	.043	.236	.027
Conceptual Renewal	.030	.014	.115
Structural Renewal	.219	.049	.413
Missional Renewal	.578	.292	.021
Lay Leadership Renewal	.452	.042	.783

The *F*-test *p*-values indicate that within the research group a statistical difference occurs between the study group and the control group in the areas of corporate renewal and conceptual renewal. I noticed a difference in structural renewal and lay leadership renewal in the gender treatment. In the same light, the treatment of the data for experience indicates a significant difference in the reports of the two groups in the area of corporate and missional renewal.

We conducted two-way ANOVA analysis on the log-transformed *p*-values between treatment categories to check for the presence of interactions between groupings. ANOVA analysis identified any other statistical differences between treatments. The *p*-values from the two-way treatments of the research variables reveal no significant differences between the treatments. Table 4.9 reports two-way ANOVA testing data. The two-way treatment *p*-values indicate no interaction between any of the treatments. The conclusion to be drawn from the two-way testing is that differences between the control groupings are significant.

Table 4.9. Two-way ANOVA Comparison

N=74	Two-Way ANOVA <i>F</i> -Test <i>p</i> -Values					
	Personal Renewal	Corporate Renewal	Conceptual Renewal	Structural Renewal	Missiological Renewal	Lay- Lead Renewal
Research Grouping	.758	.043	.030	.219	.577	.451
Gender	.428	.236	.014	.048	.292	.042
Experience	.159	.027	.115	.413	.020	.783
Total Sample v. Gender	.458	.370	.735	.802	.264	.226
Total Sample v. Experience	.715	.710	.334	.738	.616	.219
Gender v. Experience	.502	.642	.754	.704	.149	.424

Qualitative Measures of Research

I conducted semi-guided interviews at each study church location. I interviewed both the pastor and the key leadership of the local congregation. In order to objectify, as much as possible, the themes rising from those interviews, I developed a coding sheet guided by the discoveries from my survey of relevant literature. Two members of my Research Reflection Team coded the interviews.

Operative Elements in Transition to Vitality

A primary focus of this research was to identify the operative elements in the studied churches' transition to vitality. These elements primarily arise from the semi-guided on-site interviews. They appear both in the coding responses and in the casual comments found in the interview transcripts. Table 4.10 reports the data from the coding process in terms of the raw average reported by the coders and the average number of responses by category.

Table 4.10. Coding Responses

Coding Category	Raw Average	Category Average
Acts 6/7 leadership	144.5	16.1
Operating according to an understood "Hedgehog Concept"	101.0	20.2
Confronting the brutal reality	57.0	19.0
Development of a culture of discipline and excellence	36.0	12.0
Transformation in worship	31.5	10.5
Appropriate ministry structures	34.0	6.8
Open an affirming relational structures	48.5	9.7
Congregational missional involvement	59.0	11.4
Significant individual and corporate involvement in prayer	29.0	29.0

The most mentioned aspect of the renewal of each congregation was prayer. The second most highly reported element of the renewal of each congregation was the church's organization and renewal according to an understood and defined Hedgehog Concept. The third element of transition identified by the pastors and leaders of the transitioned congregations was the ability of the leadership to confront the brutal reality of the situation in which they found themselves. The fourth most reported element of transition was the leadership style and nature of the lead pastor. The fifth element reported was the development of a culture of discipline and excellence.

Prayer. The primary element operative to the revitalization of the newly vital churches as opposed to the control churches is a consistent emphasis and practice of prayer. Pastors and leaders of each of the studied churches mention prayer and corporate prayer as one of the most significant operative elements in the transitions experienced.

The theme of prayer occurred so often that I added a thirty-ninth category to the coding sheet, indicating the significance of prayer to the congregation. The pastoral leadership team of Pastor D and Pastor E of Owings Mills First Latino Church identified as one of the key problems of the pre-transformation congregation the fact that the leaders had no time for corporate prayer. Their personal strategy was to develop times of corporate prayer.

As an example of the prayer initiative, Owings Mills has no less than seven weekly meetings for the congregation and its leaders to pray for not less than one hour at a time for the church and its mission. The church holds prayer meetings each Monday evening for two hours, Tuesday morning for one hour, Wednesday for one hour, Thursday morning for two hours, before the Friday evening worship service, an open-ended prayer meeting at 6:00 on Saturday evening, and an hour of prayer before worship on Sunday. The leaders add to these scheduled services a prayer and fasting service that lasts until at least midnight. The first Sunday of each month the entire congregation is invited to join in the prayer and fasting.

Leaders at Media reported the effect of prayer in creating new excitement that comes with spiritual growth and a renewal of passion:

One of the things that has fed it [spiritual growth] has been seeing God at work so that when you're praying as a church and seeing miracles happen, that stuff tends to feed on itself and then it encourages the congregation to continue and to be more adamant because you are seeing how God will work.

The corporate prayer effort was crucial to the turnaround experienced by the church at Media. The pastor and people repeatedly affirmed the significance of prayer as a catalyst to the turn around. Table 4.11 indicates the coded responses relating to prayer

in the interview transcripts.

Table 4.11. Interview Responses Dealing with Prayer

	Total Responses (average)	Total Responses (raw)	Pastor's Responses (average)	Lay Responses (average)
The pastor, lay leadership and members recognize prayer as an essential component of the process of transition	29	58	7	22

The East Palestine and Media lay-leadership teams supported the fact that prayer was a central component in their transition to renewal. Prayer as an important component of renewal appears fifteen times in Media's interviews, thirteen times in East Palestine's interviews. Fawn Grove identifies prayer eight times. Stratton mentions prayer five times. Lakeside lay leaders mention prayer twice in their interviews. When asked what the most important priorities of the renewed church were, one of East Palestine's lay leaders offered, "I think it's prayer. Prayer is needed for everyone." Another lay leader, when asked about his role in the transition, stated, "Well, me, myself, I did a lot of praying. I don't make one decision for the church unless I pray about it, and I think that listening to God and trying to let him lead and not us, letting us step back and make sure that God is the one that we're following and He's the one that wants the changes." The Media lay leadership team echoes the priority of prayer in the transformation of their church: "There is more of an emphasis on prayer which is the pillar. I think it's one of the pillars of our church, one of the main ones, which it needs to be."

Organizing and Operating According to an Understood Hedgehog Concept.

The importance of conceptual renewal was reflected in the responses given in the on-site interviews. Conceptual renewal is indicative of a congregation and leadership's ability to

conceive of reality in new and vital ways. Conceptual reality was illustrated in the transitioned church pastors' and leaders' ability to organize and participate in a renewed and upwardly/outwardly focused vision as defined by their Hedgehog Concept. Two specific categories of the coding sheet measured conceptual renewal and transition (see Appendix F). Categories 3 and 11 through 14 measured a congregation's and leadership team's commitment to a core principle or guiding mission as identified by Rainer as the congregation's Vision, Intersection Profile (113).

The leaders of the studied congregations all pointed to renewed sense of purpose as significant to their turn around. The pastor and leaders of the renewed churches described the renewal as a realization that the ministries implemented, the worship engaged, and the reason for their existence. Pastor G, pastor of the Lakeside church, spoke of the renewed focus of his church:

They are constantly looking for something else to do. We are getting out in the community. We are having more of an impact on the community and they are not satisfied with that. They want more. They are going after in any way shape or form that they can.

He goes on to characterize the priority of the church's outward focus:

Reaching the lost,... but more than that, letting people know that Christ loves them. They really want people to know that it doesn't matter what church you want to go to, Christ loves you anyway. He wants to do something in your life and he wants to make your life meaningful. That is the two main issues that they want to see done.

Renewed outward focus enabled them to lay aside selfish desires, habits, and desires in order to see the mission of the local church move forward into the unchurched community. The renewal pastors and leaders spoke repeatedly and often of the desire to see the lost come to faith and their church and ministries become the instrument that God used to affect that salvation. Further, the leaders applied outward focus to the ministries

of the church with a high degree of intentionality. The renewed churches did not allow matters to return to an inward and truncated focus. They spent time and resources to maintain a missional outlook on all areas of church life and ministry. The leadership team of the Ebensburg church possesses a “willingness to open ourselves up to looking at ministry not from a church standpoint, but from a community standpoint. What is it that our community needs? What is it, and how can we reach them?” Owings Mills develops its new believers with a four-tiered program that produces leaders who, in turn, train the next generation of new believers. The goal of this program is to produce believers who are consistently sharing their faith with others and leading new believers to relationship with Jesus Christ. To engrain the priority of sharing the faith into the life of the member, the members practice visitation, personal evangelism, acts of loving service, and fellowship each Sunday after the morning worship services.

Many identify the corporate renewal that vital churches experience in renewed worship as a by-product of the relative health of that congregation. The newly vital churches that I interviewed indicated that the transformation of their worship was directly related to their Hedgehog Concept and outward focus. The transformation of worship services was described as the creation of worship that is relevant to the culture in which the church exists. This crucial component to the renewal of worship is motivated by the leadership’s desire to engage in living out the understood purpose of the church as described by its Hedgehog Concept. Pastor A and the Stratton Church targeted younger people and families in the community. They designed a blended worship service. The transition to a blended worship service was intentional, designed to meet both the needs of the older members of the congregation and the needs of the younger people that they

needed in order to survive. The transition to a blended service was not an easy change, it required the older congregation to accept newer styles that were not necessarily what they knew best or liked. The seventy-eight year old patriarch of the church described his role in the transition: “I am happy that [crying] my three boys and my grandson and my daughter-in-law are here. They’re here with their grandpa and it just means an awful lot to me.” While discussing the change in worship style, the twenty year-old grandson of the patriarch offered, “The time has changed, that was still God-centered, that’s still God worshipped, and what we do is 100 percent worship.” The worship leader observed that the kind of music does not matter in their congregation: “Praising God and *getting the message across* [emphasis mine]” is the most important thing. Further, he stated, the kind of music used is “*whatever would reach these people* [emphasis mine] and share the Word of God.”

In referring to the renewed outward focus of worship, one leader from Media observed, “We realized that it was not all about us, it’s about the people out there that need it just as well as we need it.” East Palestine did not change to a contemporary style; rather, it changed to contemporary instruments, playing songs that are meaningful in their context. They are in an older and graying community. Their focus is on meeting the needs of the poor and elderly in a declining community. Their worship is now exciting, engaging, and meaningful to those who are coming. Fawn Grove also did not make a change to contemporary worship. The congregation is located in rural southeastern Pennsylvania. Pastor F described the worship transformation: “We blended some things, mostly through technology [to meet the needs of the gen-Xers]. We have found a balance of worship style.”

I designed categories 21-23 of the coding guide to measure the churches' renewal and passion in worship. Table 4.12 reports the interview coding responses related to renewed passion and relevance in worship.

Table 4.12. Interview Coding Related to Renewed Passion and Relevance in Worship

	Total Responses (average)	Total Responses (raw)	Pastor's Responses (average)	Lay Lead Responses (average)
21. Worship services exhibit passion and routinely experience the presence of God	9.5	19	1.5	8.0
22. The church's worship intentionally engages the culture in which the congregation exists	10.0	20	3.5	6.5
23. The congregation's worship is centered on God	12.0	24	1.0	11.0

Each church interviewed indicated a significant renewal in the quality and passion of the community worship experience. The renewal of corporate worship occurs at two levels. The first level is the renewal of passion and the experience of God in meaningful worship. Each church's pastor and leadership team pointed to renewed worship as a key component in their transition. Pastor B, prior to accepting the pastorate of the Media Church attended a worship service and expressed dismay at the poor quality of the worship experience. She stated, "I was mortified how dry and how lifeless it had been." One of Media's leaders agreed with this assessment of the lack of passion in worship: "Prior to three years ago, there was no substance in the worship service, there was no substance in the type of music that was sung. There was not substance in the message." The East Palestine leadership described worship prior to their transition as listening to tapes for music with few people involved and generally being dry.

Each church describes a renewed passion and excitement in worship. Individuals come to worship expecting to hear and engage God in their worship. In describing their worship since the transition, East Palestine offers, “We have a freedom of worship and we have a wonderful song service which pulls in toward the message. The Holy Spirit is very present.” Pastor A, talking about the renewal of the worship and life at Stratton observed, “You know, somewhere along the line, God showed up. That is all I can say. I really think it is a miracle. You know, the people have responded to the Spirit.” A leader on the Media team described his new passion for worship, “I gotta get to the worship.... It’s the heart of the matter. Everything else is secondary.”

No interview responses addressed the issue of exactly what catalyzed the renewal of passionate worship. That the outward focus and the creation of a worship experience that met the perceived needs of the community surrounding the studied churches might have yielded new converts whose enthusiasm naturally contributed to the renewal of the revitalized congregations. Similarly, the prayer emphasis in which the studied congregations engaged possibly revitalized the believers who worshipped in these congregations and these passionate believers worshipped more passionately than they had previously. The renewed attention to detail in worship planning and execution might have created a new atmosphere of worship that contributed to the overall worship experience. Finally, all three factors together may have catalyzed the renewal of passionate, engaging, and relevant worship.

Ability to confront the brutal reality. A further indicator of conceptual renewal was a transitioned congregation’s ability to confront the reality of the previous situation and rather than being paralyzed by the proximity of impending doom to use that

awareness as a catalyst for positive renewal. Categories 15 through 17 of the coding sheet measured a congregation's ability to confront the brutal reality of the need for transition. Categories 3, and 11 measured a congregations adherence to a clearly defined and understood Hedgehog Concept. In each of these areas, the church leadership consistently identified these renewal themes as a significant part of their transition. Table 4.13 reports the raw coding scores for these categories.

Table 4.13. Interview Responses Indicating Conceptual Renewal

Question	Coding Score
3. Seeks to lead church and self to ministry beyond the walls of the church	19
11. Persistent in pursuit of goals and purposes to realize vision	45
12. Overtly aware of leadership passion	14
13. Intentionally aware of Congregation's gifts and passions	10.5
14. Clearly aware of the specific needs of the community in which the congregation exists	12
15. The church and its leadership became acutely aware that they were not living in the reality of what God wanted them to be	23.5
16. The leadership team confronted the brutal facts of the church's reality with a strong belief that God could use them to turn around the situation	22
17. After change began a crisis took place in the hearts of the leaders and/or the members of the church	11.5

Common across all of the transformed churches was a realization that the life and ministry of the church was less than vital and radical change was necessary for vitality to return. Categories 15-17 of the coding guide deal with the pastor's and the leader's ability and willingness to confront the reality of the need for transformation. The lay leadership groups at Lakeside and Media led the responses in this category with twenty-one and eighteen responses across the three categories respectively. The pastors all responded a similar number of times to the three categories. The total number of times that categories

related to confronting the reality appeared in the pastors' interview varied between six and eight times. Each pastor came to the understanding that, in order for their local congregation to survive, let alone become vital again, serious changes needed to come to the church. Pastor A, when asked, "Was there an event or discovery that led to the awareness that the congregation needed to change?" responded, "Well, other than the fact that they were ready to lock the doors; I was very blunt with them when I got here, they may not get another chance. They all knew that they were ready to close. They understood that." The leaders of the Stratton Church back up that assessment when they stated the condition of their church prior to its transition as simply "Dead." My Research Reflection Team observed that each church that has been revitalized might have done so in part because they had nothing to lose. Each church had come face to face with their mortality; as a result, they may have experienced a new freedom in ministry.

The survey, the on-site interviews, and relevant literature clarify the reality that if a church and its leadership team sincerely wants to move beyond a current reality of decline, they must honestly and openly confront and embrace the realistic facts of their current situation. The knowledge of the need to change should then become the impetus to move towards the vision that God can create in their midst. The realization must become a conviction that causes the pastor and people to pay the considerable price to move from decay to renewal and revitalization. The Media leadership team underscores the significance of how ownership of the brutal reality can transform a congregation.

Six months prior to the appointment of Pastor B as pastor, four laypeople from the church decided that the church was not going to close on their watch. To begin the transformation, these four leaders, at their own personal expense and time, attended the

New Church University sponsored by the Philadelphia District Church of the Nazarene. They learned the beginning principles that they incorporated into their transition strategy. These four people, who knew the perilous condition of their situation, intentionally became the leaders who sought to begin the transformation of their church. This group became part of the core leadership who catalyzed the transition of the church.

Another element operative in the transformation of each of the six churches studied is the renewal of an outward focus. Each church studied spoke of the renewal as marked by a change in its focus. One lay leader from Media observed that the focus of the church prior to the transition “was internal, not external. So, it dealt with those within the congregation, and nothing outwardly into the community.” Pastor B recounted that she asked the church, “What is your purpose?” They replied to her, “You know to survive.” When she asked them what they did for their community, their response was, “Nothing.” Fawn Grove echoes this sentiment with a different focus. “The people were coming but there was nothing. They were just going through the motions. There was no excitement. Things were rather grim.” Further echoing that sentiment, when asked, “What was the primary purpose and focus for your church before the transition,” another leader stated, “We were here to build faith with the congregation of people who were already believers... I would say a large part of what we did was feeding the sheep.”

Each church leadership team and pastor noticed a change of focus and purpose for existence and mission. When asked about the primary focus for the church now, after the transition, a lay leader from Media stated, “I think [our] number one [priority] is reaching outside of ourselves to make Christ known to others.” Another leader followed up saying, “Our caring for other people ... for those that we know that need it, and for those that we

don't know that need it." Minutes later, when describing the spiritual climate of the church, one leader observed, "It's gone from a within to a without." Another leader summed up the change in focus as, "Our number one [priority] is reaching outside of ourselves to make Christ known to others." Pastor C from East Palestine described the renewed focus of their church: "meeting the needs of the community as far as doing outreach with compassionate type ministry." The lay leaders support the pastor's assessment: "One [priority] would have to be winning souls. I think that is very much what we want,... reaching out in the community and, you know, we would save everyone if we possibly could. I mean, that's our goal."

Questions 34-37 of the coding sheet reflect the congregation's missional renewal and involvement in an outward-focused mission and purpose. Questions 12-14 analyzed a pastor's and leadership group's understanding and focus on their mission and purpose. Questions 3 and 11 measured a congregation's commitment to their hedgehog principle. These two categories of the coding sheet contained the third highest number of responses. Table 4.14 reports the responses to the questions dealing with renewed focus and vision.

Table 4.14. Interview Responses Related to Renewed Focus and Vision

	Total Responses (average)	Total Responses (raw)	Pastor's Responses (average)	Lay Lead Responses (average)
3. Seeks to lead church and self to ministry beyond the walls of the church	19	39	15.5	9.0
11. Persistent in pursuit of goals and purposes to realize vision	45	90	31.0	19.0
12. Overtly aware of leadership passion	10.5	21	3	7.5
13. Intentionally aware of congregation's gifts and passions	10.5	21	3	7.5
14. Clearly aware of the specific needs of the community in which the congregation exists	12	24	4	8
34. The church and its leadership convey a vision which consistently focuses upon ministry outside of the church setting	17.5	35	6.5	11
35. The congregation's priority is upon finding avenues of ministry which impact the community in which it exists	15.5	31	6	8.5
36. Members of the congregation are regularly involved in ministry efforts in the community	12	24	5.5	6.5
37. A significant portion of the church's operating budget is designed for outside ministry support and development	3	6	1.5	1.5
38. The congregation exhibits a culture of evangelism and outreach	9	18	3	6

Role of pastoral leadership in transition. I measured the role of the pastor in the transition process through the on-site interviews to discover the individual pastor's perception of his or her role in the transition and the lay leadership's perception of the pastor's role. The coding of the interview responses according to a thirty-nine item coding sheet, as well as the reflection on those interviews by my Research Reflection Team indicated the perception of the pastor's role in an individual church's transition to vitality.

Items 1 through 11 of the coding sheet measured the relative level of the pastor's significance to the transition process according to Rainer's Acts 6/7 leadership

characteristic of the leaders of breakout churches. The references to these eleven categories were some of the most highly coded responses from the interviews. The single most referenced Acts 6/7 indicator, which also received the largest number of responses of all of the interview categories, was category 11. Category 11 stated that the pastor was “persistent in pursuit of goals and purposes to realize vision.” Table 4.15 reports the averages and raw responses from the coding sheet related to the pastor’s role in transition.

Table 4.15. Raw Data from Coding of Interviews Related to Pastoral Role in Transition

	Average	Raw Total	Pastoral Response (average)	Lay Response (average)
1. Knows of God’s call to ministry and has responded to that call	9	19	5.5	3.5
2. Takes time to do well the basics of Christian ministry	20	40	14.0	6.0
4. Exudes a contagious enthusiasm for ministry; others gladly follow	19	39	10.5	9.0
5. Is willing to take risks; where success is only possible in God’s power	16	32	10.0	6.0
6. Has a burden for a successful ministry beyond his own tenure	12	24	8.5	3.5
7. Exhibits fierce biblical faithfulness	26	51	11.5	14.0
8. Possesses a strong sense of personal responsibility when things go badly	5	11	3.0	2.0
9. Consistently finds ways to communicate the love that they have for the congregation	23	46	10.5	11.5
10. Possesses a strong personal humility yet is confident in her leadership	24	47	11.0	12.5

The acknowledgement that the pastor’s persistence in pursuit of goals and vision is, by far, the most reported characteristic of the pastoral leadership of the transitioned churches. In the average number of responses, in the pastors’ responses and in the lay

leaders' responses, this factor occurs more than twice the number of times as any other category. The second most reported trait of the pastoral leadership of the revitalized churches is a fierce commitment to Scripture and biblical faithfulness. Close behind biblical faithfulness are the possession of a strong personal humility with a confidence in personal leadership and the ability to communicate love and concern to the flock.

The Research Reflection Team noticed that the pastors of the Fawn Grove, Owings Mills, and Media Churches were all cognizant of their role in the transition. The coders reported that the interviews with Pastor B (Media) totaled fifty-seven total occurrences, Pastor D (Owings Mills) received forty occurrences, and Pastor F (Fawn Grove) sixty-six occurrence of these eleven themes. The Ebensburg (sixty-two occurrences), Media (forty-two occurrences), and Stratton (thirty-three occurrences) lay leaders recognized the leadership of the pastors as significant to their transitions.

The pastors and leaders reported the following leadership traits of the pastor most often: persistence (question 11), a commitment to biblical faithfulness (question 7), a strong personal humility reflected in confident leadership (question 10), communication of love to the congregation (question 9), quality and competence in ministry skills (question 2), engagement in ministry beyond the walls of the church (question 3), and enthusiasm for ministry (question 4). The semi-guided interviews support the role of the pastor in the transition to vitality. When asked, "Who were the people without whom the transition could not have happened?" one leader described the pastor's significance in the transition they experienced:

Pastor _____ would have been significant. He came in and he has a way of looking at the way we were doing some of the things we were doing. I think he helped us to appreciate our ruralness as being an aspect.... [he

helped us understand] everyone who comes on our campus is looking for a[n] encounter with God.

During the East Palestine interview, when asked the same question, the leaders said, “I think Pastor _____ ... and Pastor _____ One compliments the other and you know, what one is weak in, the other one picks up and before they’re just as strong as the other one.” Another leader said, “Pastor _____ said, ‘increase the spirituality and everything else will increase’” (East Palestine 21). The Stratton leadership team also identified the coming of the pastoral family of Pastor A as the key event in their turn around. The quick response when asked who the key people were in their transition to vitality was simply “The _____” (Stratton 21).

The semi-guided interviews revealed some of the traits and activities that the lay leaders and pastors considered significant regarding the pastors’ role in transition. Pastor G from Lakeside Community Church identified his role as encouraging people to look to the future and his ability to help people see and reach their potential. The leaders of the Lakeside Church consider Pastor G’s commitment to teaching the Bible and living biblically as well as for verbalizing the church’s purpose for existence as significant to the renewal. The Research Reflection Team observed that “[the] pastor intentionally pushed the congregation to be outwardly focused, and they bought into it.”

Pastor B, of the Media Church, identified her desire to create an organization that will exist and be healthy beyond her tenure as pastor as one of the keys to Media’s turnaround. To that end, she spends significant time identifying and training leaders and involving them in ministries. The lay leadership echoed this sentiment: “What Pastor _____ has done for us as a church is, she came in and she showed us how to be true and living disciples. Pastor _____ gave us the tools and showed us how to [use them].” A

further role of the pastor in the revitalization at Media is that the pastor involved herself in common menial tasks with the laity. One leader observed, “She was working side by side with people who had come out to help work on the house. It has a lot of repairs that it needed. Yeah, she wasn’t above that.”

A further contribution of the pastoral office in transition occurring in the transformed churches is the pastors’ discipling, empowering, and developing leaders who do the tasks of ministry. Owings Mills Latino church is the most overt illustration of the role of the pastor in enabling lay leaders to accomplish their unique ministries. Pastor D has developed an intentional and specific four-tiered plan for the discipleship of new believers in order to move them from novices in the faith to leaders within the body of Christ.

The Lakeside lay leadership team underscored the significance of the pastor’s role in leading the transition of a small church to vitality by observing that prior to their transition point they had been plagued by chronic poor leadership. One lay leader alluded to the previous leadership: “I don’t want this to sound improper, but I feel like I should say it. I believe that in the, previous to Pastor _____, the Nazarene Manual was preached and the Bible was referenced whereas now the Bible is preached and the Manual is referenced.” Another leader emphasized the lack of leadership in her statement: “Before this [we] were just there, just kind of whatever.”

The lay leaders of the Media Church also identified poor pastoral leadership prior to their transition point: “We had no sense of direction. We had no sense of leadership.” Further on in the interview, another leader pointed to the problem of prior leadership: “The former pastor is somebody, if you wanted to begin a ministry; you were

basically on your own. The former pastor wasn't involved. He basically let you do whatever you wanted to do." Central to each church's transition to vitality was the strong, biblically based leadership of the lead pastors.

Development of a culture of discipline and excellence. A fifth element reported to be operative behind the transformation of the studied group churches is the development of a culture of discipline and excellence. Three categories, 18-20 on the interview coding sheet measured the congregations' development of discipline and excellence. Questions 18 and 20 received the most responses, with an average of 16.5 and 14.5 responses each. Category 18 measured the church's (and the leadership's) unwillingness to accept the status quo while category 20 identified the expectations of excellence in ministry efforts. Table 4.16 lists the coding scores related to developing a culture of discipline and excellence.

Table 4.16. Interview Coding Related to Developing a Culture of Discipline and Excellence

	Total Responses (average)	Total Responses (raw)	Pastor's Responses (average)	Lay Lead Responses (average)
18. The church and its leadership became unwilling to accept the status quo	17.5	35	6.0	11.5
19. Practices were developed that measured the ministry efforts	4.0	8	3.0	1.0
20. The pastor and leaders expect excellence in effort and ministry	14.5	29	2.5	12.0

Pastor G described his church's development of a culture of accountability: "a willingness to open ourselves up to looking at ministry not from a church standpoint, but from a community standpoint, [asking] [w]hat is it that our community needs? How can

we reach them?” While this response indicates a renewed outward focus, it also indicates the scale with which Lakeside evaluates its ministries and activities. The Media leadership emphasized the creation of accountability as a significant factor in their renewal. A leader stated, “I think one of the keys was accountability. You know, whether you wanted to or not, she made you accountable, but we also were accountable to her.”

Refusing to accept the status quo as the direction for the future was reported as key to the renewal of these churches. Pastor C from East Palestine, discussing the barriers to the transition refers to getting comfortable with the early levels of renewal and stalling at that point. Being unwilling to stop with small transition, Pastor C observed, “After a certain period of time, you gotta break through another barrier.... If you don’t keep moving that bar, you start to spiral downward.” Pastor F highlights the same concept: “I will not allow us to keep the bar that low. We have to keep challenging ourselves. We have to keep stretching us.”

Corporate Renewal

These five primary components of renewal yielded a new atmosphere of love and acceptance as well as openness within the studied congregations. In addition to renewed spiritual vitality, each congregation evidenced a renewal of relational vitality in each studied congregation. The interplay between the individuals present at the on-site interviews revealed a high level of community. As an outsider observing the interviews, I was amazed at the closeness evidenced and expressed by the members of the leadership teams as well as by and for the pastors. While the overall level of the perceived renewal in the category of relational structures was not as high as several other categories, category number 33, which measured the perceived atmosphere of love and acceptance,

had an average value of 30. The pastors responded three times to this category. The lay leaders responded twenty-seven times.

The Media leadership team reflected relational renewal by expressing a high level of accountability to one another and by being openly loving and accepting of outsiders, including one leadership team member who 3½ years ago was released from prison and living in the park. One of the leaders expressed the relational vitality by saying, “We all support each other, too! We’re all here for each other. I know that I can go to anybody in this room and say, ‘I’m having a problem, would you pray for me?’ and they’re right there on the spot for you.” East Palestine also clearly pointed to the renewal of relational vitality in their congregation. One newer member to the team observed, “One thing that brought me here was the love. I felt loved from the very first time I came into this church. You could just feel the love and you could just feel the Holy Spirit... I was accepted. The Lakeside Church leaders characterized their church as a caring church that reaches out into the community as well as a congregation that makes a person feel welcome from the moment that they come in the door.

Relational vitality in each of these congregations is illustrated not only in love and acceptance but in genuine enjoyment of one another. One of the common themes of each renewed congregation was shared time laboring together. East Palestine and Stratton each remodeled their worship space and church building to become more pleasing and appealing to newcomers. The Media Church came together to repair and make livable the parsonage as well as to maintain the worship facility. The Owings Mills Church people gather together to pray, to train, and to be trained as well as to go out into the community to share the gospel.

Summary of Major Findings

Analysis of my research data supported four conclusions regarding the transition process experienced by the studied churches.

1. Community demographics were not a contributing factor to the renewal experienced by the transitioned churches.

2. While the study churches reported generally higher levels of renewal than did the control churches, the mean levels do not vary significantly.

3. The study churches experienced a markedly higher perceived level of conceptual and corporate renewal than did the control churches.

4. The pastoral leader of the church is a central component to the transition of the renewed vitality churches.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This research project originated from a desire to understand how and why some small churches experience a renewed vitality and some small churches remain stagnant and in decline. To that end, I designed and tested a research survey to measure the relative level of renewal experienced by the congregation in six key areas. In order to understand the process of transition, I conducted on-site semi-guided interviews at each study church. The hope operating behind the study was that I would be able to understand why some churches transition to vitality so that I can coach other churches to move toward renewed vitality in Christ.

This project does not merely measure church growth in terms of numbers or financial growth. The study sought to move deeper than the church health measures to discern the vitality or life breath of the church. The implementation of new programming, stewardship, or discipleship campaigns or the application of the latest and greatest principles from some other church does not guarantee the vitality of the local church. The purpose of this research was to understand how the transition between stagnation and decline to vitality may be accomplished in small churches.

Corporate Renewal

I have noted previously that Herrington, Bonem, and Furr assert that spiritual and relational vitality are key components to the transformation process (16). The qualitative and the quantitative data behind this research confirm that renewal of spiritual and relational vitality is necessary components to the renewal of vitality of the studied churches. I have measured spiritual and relational vitality in terms of corporate renewal.

Questions on the survey that were related to corporate renewal measured renewal in worship, in relationships, and in personal discipleship. The mean data that measured corporate renewal did not vary that greatly. In fact, the mean responses indicated that the control churches perceived a higher level of corporate renewal than did the studied churches. The difference between the control and the study group arose as the statistical analysis progressed. The MANOVA testing confirms that a difference exists between the control and study groupings. ANOVA testing then confirms that the difference between the groups is in the conceptual and corporate renewal categories.

A possible implication of the perception of the control churches that they experienced a *higher level* of corporate renewal than did the study churches is that the control churches have yet to face the fact that they are *not vital*. While the studied churches have and continue to face the reality that they desperately needed to change, and continue to change to impact the community, the control churches could be generally content to remain the small and comfortable group that they currently experience.

The interview process, conducted in the study churches, reveals a high level of renewal of both the vertical relationship with God and the horizontal relationships with others, both inside and outside of the fellowship. The corporate renewal exhibited itself in a renewal of interpersonal relationships, as well as renewed worship that experiences God and is relevant to the community at large and in significant corporate prayer. Most literature bears out the importance of good relationships within the body of Christ. Good relationships within the membership are especially important in the small membership church. Callahan, Dudley, and others affirm that one of the primary strengths of the small church is the family atmosphere and the strong sense of community. The unity exhibited

by small churches is in harmony with Collins' understanding that the most important asset of any truly great organization is its people. The people who call a small church home are the ones who not only execute the mission of the church, they live out its shared values in the community at large. The corporate renewal of the horizontal relationships within the vital church makes possible the attraction and connection of new people to the local body of Christ.

Prayer

A primary implication of this research is that churches and pastors need to return to basics if renewal is to be experienced. The single most referenced component of the transformation of the study churches is prayer. The number of reports that prayer is central to each church's renewal indicates that prayer is a key component to renewed vitality. Prayer is the foundation of the individual and corporate experience of God. Prayer is the ordinary means that God uses to transform the lives of individuals as well as his church. Given the fact that the church is the body of Christ, if it is to be renewed, the foundation of that renewal must be a renewed and dynamic relationship with him that begins in prayer and passionate worship.

The few works that mention prayer as a key catalyst of the transformation of stalled or declining churches do so with great passion and clarity. Crandall reminds the attentive leader that prayer is the starting point to turn around (47). Patton identifies corporate prayer as the first and primary lever of the transformation of any small church (77-78). The NCD model depends on passionate spirituality as a primary component of the biotic growth of the church. Passionate spirituality begins and lives in continual, passionate, individual and corporate prayer. The semi-guided interviews emphasize the

absolute necessity of dynamic and ongoing prayer within the life of the church that wishes to be renewed and reformed. Farley insists that a stable, plateaued church must be involved in active aggressive prayer if it would be revived (63).

These findings support the necessity of a congregation's focus on meaningful worship that intentionally engages people in the experience of God. Each studied church points directly to the renewal of their worship experiences as a contributing factor in their transition. Whether renewed worship is a cause of transformation or an evidence of the transformation is not immediately clear. I believe that corporate renewal experienced by the renewed churches, particularly worship renewal, may be both. Renewal of passion in worship and a heightened awareness of the experience of God are reflective of a community renewed in its relationship with God. The Owings Mills First Latino church most clearly illustrates this principle of spiritual renewal and passion. Of all of the churches studied, the Owings Mills congregation spends the most time in intentional, communal prayer initiatives. Pastor D's understanding that they were lacking in significant times of prayer and lacking sufficient times of worship led to his efforts to create those times of prayer and meaningful worship as a key to their transition. Pastor D noticed that the spiritual climate of the church changed:

The group [was] seeking for more pray[er] and ... try[ing] to get more worship together, Bible studies in houses and small groups everywhere. So, he started to see that people are starting to get a little more excited to know more and share more of the Gospel with each other support each other. And the group not only maintain together but also start to bring some people around them.

Intentional prayer initiatives and experiences certainly contribute to a renewed passion and worship experience. Similarly, renewed passion in worship and a tangible personal and corporate experience of God results in a more powerful prayer life.

Crandall points to the results of the renewal of passionate worship: “In worship, renewal happens. Here under the inspired and anointed preaching of biblical yet contemporary messages, conceptual and missiological renewal is set in motion as a new vision of being God’s people and doing God’s work is caught and taught” (54).

Communities of believers who are giving attention to renewed spiritual relationship usually experience God in profoundly deeper experiences. Thus, the renewed passion for individual and corporate experience of God creates an atmosphere where passionate worship can occur. Because the atmosphere for worship is renewed, people experience the nearness of God at both corporate and personal levels.

Organizing and Operating according to an Understood Hedgehog Principle

The second implication of this study identifies the operation of the renewed church according to a clearly defined Hedgehog Concept. One of the strongest themes of the literature that I reviewed in preparation for this research is the idea of a central guiding purpose or principle that drives the church or organization forward. Collins speaks very clearly to the great company’s decision to find a very specific niche to fill. That niche was the one thing at which the company could truly excel. The great companies devoted all of their energy, resources, and focus to accomplishing that task. This same idea has been occurring in literature related specifically to the small church.

Rainer, Crandall, Macchiha, Warren, and many others write about the necessity of each church finding the unique way in which they are able to fulfill the Great Commission and the Great Commandment in tangible ways in their communities. Rainer speaks of the need of a congregation to make a “clear and positive impact on the community” (33). Without exception, all of these authors, and many others speak of the

Hedgehog Concept being an outwardly focused mission that seeks to meet the real needs in the community surrounding their ministries. Rainier, in discussing his Vision Intersection Profile, affirms that breakout churches describe the VIP as the intersection of leadership passion, community needs, and congregational gifts (114).

Each church studied referred repeatedly to the newly found purpose for their existence. Without exception, each church described their purpose, prior to the renewal, as survival or to minister to those who were already members. In contrast, those churches that experienced renewed vitality universally discovered an outwardly focused Hedgehog Concept. One leader described the transition as changing from a within to a without. While the various programs implemented by each church differed, the purposed behind them was unified. The pastors and leaders of each church had an unquenchable desire to use the resources of their local body of Christ to minister to the needs of the communities in which they existed, both local and global.

The various hedgehog principles of these churches were not slicked-up statements of mission and purpose. Rather, the Hedgehog Concept was an unflappable commitment to living out the Great Commission and the Great Commandment in clear and defined ways. Further, the focused guiding principle of the renewed vitality churches was not only a compass to chart ministries; it was the main tool to evaluate the success of the ministries engaged in. Each group that I interviewed understood that the only measure of their success was their faithfulness to making disciples and sharing the message of the gospel in tangible ways in their communities. Crandall affirms the necessity of evaluating the success of a church not in terms of profits and edifices, but in terms of carrying out the primary purpose for their existence (116).

Interestingly, all of the discussion related to worship and worship style was subservient to the discussion of the churches guiding principle. Each church did, in fact, experience a renewal in worship. However, the discussion did not relate as much to style as it did to how the worship of the church was understood by the community and how it related to the people that they wanted to attract to their congregation. Each leadership team spoke to the need to create a worship experience that is meaningful to the setting in which that congregation exists. Each team highlighted how those who were mature in their walk with God allowed different types of worship activities, styles, and experiences to be incorporated into their services. The intent was not to create something new, to appease individual tastes, or to target a segment of population. The point behind the adaptation of different worship experiences was to honor God above all else and to be relevant to the people whom they were reaching with the gospel. The Stratton worship leader described their renewal in worship:

It's not about me. It's not about me singing. It's not, "I don't care, I can get up there and sing." Maybe I can, and I make mistakes and I am human. I'm hopeful that I can get across that you need to get excited for him because he is alive. I think that [is] a huge thing in this church today, God is alive. Our church will be [alive] too if we pray.

The first purpose of worship is to glorify God and worship him. The second purpose is to connect the worshipper with the presence of the divine one.

Confronting the Brutal Reality of the Need for Change

The second of the major categories of renewal that my research identified as statistically different in the renewal churches as opposed to the control group churches is conceptual renewal. Conceptual renewal identifies the ability of the pastor, leadership, and congregation to think in new ways. Conceptual renewal exhibited the greatest

difference between the control and study groups both in the mean values (3.66 control as compared to 3.40 study) this difference is reflected in the one-way ANOVA testing ($p=.03$). The new way of thinking and conceiving of the reality that the churches face is outwardly focused.

My research indicates that the first stage of the conceptual renewal is the ability to understand the reality of the situation currently experienced. In the same way that each of Collins' *great* organizations experienced a definite transition point and Rainer's *breakout* churches experience an ABC moment, each of these six churches came to a specific point in time when they came to a transition point that defined their church. Confronting the reality of congregational decline and death, and then acting intentionally to change, proves to be an essential component of the transition to vitality from stagnation and decline. In order for transition to happen, there must first be a realization that the current situation is undesirable. This realization must be accompanied by sufficient desire to create a new reality that those with the ability to change create momentum and energy to move the change initiative forward. The church wishing to experience renewed vitality must not only come to the realization that change would be beneficial; they must cultivate a hunger to see change become a reality.

Collins observes that good companies never confront the reality that their *goodness* becomes a barrier to their becoming truly great (3). Similarly, many churches become so myopic by the situation in which they exist that they cannot see the greater reality operating around them. Declining churches often fail to realize the powerful danger that they are in if they do not change. Rainer similarly recognizes that each breakout church experienced a moment when they recognized the truth of the trouble that

they were in (71).

The study churches all came to the realization that they were in deep trouble. Several of the churches came to the sober understanding that they were very near death. That awareness without a desire to conceive of the situation differently can only breed hopelessness. The interviews revealed that the leaders not only conceived of a new reality but also understood that God desired that reality for them and could enable them to achieve that reality. By confronting the brutal reality, they also discovered a new confidence in the power of God to work in them.

One must be cognizant of the fact that each church that confronted the reality that they faced had two options: They could be paralyzed by fear at their pending doom, or the realization could catalyze long-term healthy transition. The pastors and leaders of the turnaround churches never wavered in their optimism that God could work a miracle in their midst. Like Stockdale, they were confident in their outcome (Collins 85). They insisted on being honest with God and honest with themselves in relation to the reality of their plateau or decline, yet that honesty bred an unshakeable commitment to become renewed and transformed by the mission of Jesus Christ.

Role of Pastoral Leadership in Transition

Like the Collins work that inspired this research, I tried to dismiss the significance of the pastor to the transition of the studied churches to renewed vitality. Like the Collins' study, the role of the pastor is clearly a significant piece to the puzzle of renewed vitality. The interview responses provided by both the pastors and the leaders of the renewed churches indicated the importance of the role of the lead pastor in the transition process of experienced by the churches. As I compiled my Transition Theory Correlation

Grid (see Appendix G), the significance of the role of the pastor/leader began to become clear to me. The role of empowering leadership and strong pastoral leadership is common to every major stream of transition literature that I surveyed. Strong and empowering leadership was the only category to repeat across all five major categories. Collins and Rainer both affirm the critical role that the leader plays in the greatness of the transformed organization. Callahan testifies to the need of a strong leader. The right individual to lead the transition is crucial to the transformation of a stalled or declining congregation.

Survey data does not support any significance to the contribution of years of pastoral service to the transformation experienced by the studied churches. While the level of experience does not appear to have significantly affected the transitions of these churches, the interview responses indicate a powerful synergism operative among the pastors, the leadership team and the congregations of the renewed congregations. Categories 1-2 and 4-10 on the coding sheet measured the impact of the role of the pastor upon the transition process in terms of Rainer's Acts 6/7 leader identification (see Table 4.11, p. 137). The interview coding identifies a pastor's persistent pursuit of vision and goals, a fierce faithfulness to the biblical truth, confident leadership, and an ability to express personal love for the people of the congregation as the most significant roles in the transition.

The pastor serves a powerful role in each of these churches. The pastors of the turnaround churches set and communicate God's vision for the congregation. The pastors of these churches play a significant role in these churches. Specific roles, such as administrator, encourager, organizer, teacher, or preacher, vary by church. A common

theme expressed by each turnaround church was that the pastor consistently, clearly and in a determined way communicates and leads the congregation towards the agreed destination. The pastor of each renewed church exhibited persistence and commitment to moving toward the vision and purpose of the church. Pastor A illustrated Collins' principle that the leader of a great organization exhibits great personal humility while at the same time possesses an intense force of will. During the transition process, Pastor A became aware of the need to purchase a church van. This expense enabled the church to bring people to the church as well as to enable the youth ministry to have a resource to get teens (and children) to events and activities. After prayer, the pastor was convinced the purchase of the van was the direction in which the church should move. The initial presentation to the board did not go smoothly. Pastor A backed off and gave the leadership time to discuss the purchase, its purpose and how to finance it. More importantly, they took time to pray over the purchase. When the board reconvened, they experienced a confident unity. The church purchased the van.

Pastor B is another example of the determined leadership that the turnaround pastors reflect. She brought a passionate determination to the congregation at Media. Her determination was reflected by her willingness to lovingly confront problematic issues in the congregation, by bringing accountability to the leadership team, and by her personal integrity. The pastors of the renewed congregations were simply not willing to give up on the renewal or the growth in vitality of the congregation. The determination and humble force of will was acknowledged by the leadership teams interviewed.

The pastor was not alone in moving towards the renewed vitality. The leadership team and pastor reflected a clear partnership in ministry and in direction. The relationship

between the pastor and the congregation is extremely strong, as evidenced by a willingness on the part of the laity to allow the pastor not only to set the direction in which the congregation is moving but also to hold them accountable to achieve that vision. Pastor F spoke of accountability and how he continually challenged the leaders at Fawn Grove. He said, “I will not allow us to just keep the bar that low. WE [emphasis mine] have to keep challenging ourselves. WE [emphasis mine] have to keep stretching us. We value leaders who want to put an effort, want to get involved, and want to roll up their sleeves.” One of the leaders from Media recalled a sermon Pastor B preached. In short, she invited the leaders to “get on the Jesus boat.” One leader came to a powerful realization after that sermon:

If this was going to happen, this was going to turn around, if we were going to grow, it was going to start with the leaders. This was the board. It was time for me to get busy, personally. [Along] with the rest of my fellow board members we knew we had to get busy. We had to do something.

The leaders specifically emphasized the significance of accountability between the leaders and the pastor. Several congregations spoke of difficult situations where the pastor had to take a strong stand. Rather than dividing the leadership team, those circumstances served to bring the pastor and team together.

The renewal experienced by the studied churches was a synergism between the pastor and the congregation. Pastor F spoke of this synergism when speaking of the role of the laity in the transition: “I can’t over emphasize how significant the role is [of the laity]. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts.” Later in the same interview he spoke of the need for the leaders to “roll up their sleeves” (18). Pastor B came alongside the laity at Media while remodeling the parsonage to make it livable. The leaders took

note of her efforts and appreciated her willingness to work with them. One of the Lakeside leaders reflected on this synergism between the pastor and laity. That leader described a particularly bad time in the life of the church:

I remember that bad time that we went through, that trial period and I remember Pastor _____ saying, “Now we’re going to come out on the other side of this. This is a bump in the road and this is going to make us better.” And it did, so he kind of had a game plan for us and we all prayed and hung together.

Leaders from Media expressed the nature of the synergistic relationship between the pastor and parishioners: “There is a very high percentage of those that are supportive of the pastor and part of the reason being she’s got a supportive team behind her. You know, we defend her.” The turnaround churches exhibited a strong partnership between the pastor and the parishioners. The work of the transition was carried out together. Lay leaders joined together with their pastor to move towards the joint goal.

The type of synergistic relationship that accomplishes great things in the life of a church does not happen coincidentally. One of the strengths reflected in each pastor of a turnaround church is the relational skills of the pastor. Dudley observes that successful small church pastors possess an ability to identify with the people that attend a particular congregation (*Effective Small Churches* 90). The key to accomplishing becoming a strong small church, according to Callahan, is building and cultivating relationships (*Small Strong Congregations* 95). The unique barriers to the transition of a small congregation are more likely to be overcome by loving and understanding the congregation than by leadership laws and force of will (Crandall 138). Each leadership team interview testified to this quality in each pastor of each turnaround church.

While I did not measure the *match* between the pastor and congregation, the

narrative of each church made clear to me that great care was taken in creating a match between the pastor and the congregation. While each pastor was not necessarily the initial choice of the leadership team (Pastor B being the clearest illustration of the importance of the proper match) at the time of the interview each leadership team clearly believed that the pastor was exactly what and whom they needed in a pastoral leader. Initially, the Media leadership team was adamant that they did not want a woman pastor. Pastor B was cognizant of this barrier. Despite the gender barrier, she won the leaders over. Her passion, her love, her leadership, and her care helped to cement a strong bond among the leadership, the congregation, and her. Evidence of the strength of the bond between the leadership team and Pastor B is the fear the leaders expressed that the district leadership would move her elsewhere to effect the same type of transition experienced by Media. The relationship between each congregation and their pastor was very strong. The strength of the relationship created a bond that enabled the two together to make or continue a transition to vitality.

Churches, if they intend to make a transition to vitality would do well to take great care in choosing the pastor to lead their congregation. Similarly, pastors who wish to lead or continue to lead transition and renewed vitality should take great pains to make sure that they are well suited to lead the charge they are accepting. The relationship among the pastor, the leadership team, and the congregation will make or break the transition to vitality. Each of these churches reflects a commitment of the pastor to the people and the leadership to the pastor. Pastor B's leadership team supports her and defends her to her critics. Pastor G and his leadership team have a powerful respect for one another that was palpable during the interview. They speak glowingly of his

preaching, of his teaching, of his encouragement, and his leadership. The Stratton leadership team points directly to the arrival of Pastor A as the critical event in their transition.

Unfortunately, many pastors are guilty of dismissing their role in the leadership of a congregation. Literature germane to the topic and my research dismiss this misunderstanding. Lay leaders recognize and believe that the leadership of the pastor is critical to the progress of the church. The leaders of each congregation that experienced transition pointed directly to the leadership of their respective pastors as one of the central components of their renewal. These pastors provide leadership. They provide encouragement; they provide sound biblical preaching and teaching. The leaders of these churches look to their pastor for *leadership*. The transition experienced by these churches are the perfect intersection of a congregation that was acutely aware of the gravity of their situation, a pastor who was well suited to minister and lead in that particular context, and the divine activity of the Holy Spirit.

When one reads about the early church in the book of Acts, one realizes that God raises up individuals to roles of leadership in his Church. He gifts these leaders with a charisma and a wisdom that is suited for advancing the kingdom of God in specific locations. These leaders are the tools that God uses to grow his church. Paul, in Romans chapter 12 challenges those who are gifted: “[I]f a man’s gift is ... leadership, let him govern diligently” (Rom. 12:8). Pastors, too, need to focus on leading wisely and biblically. They can catalyze the transition of a stalled or declining church. However, for the leadership catalyst to activate, the situation, setting and people must be well matched for the transition to move forward. Next to the spiritual renewal spoken of earlier the

most significant component of renewed vitality is the relationship and match between the pastor and the leadership team.

Development of a Culture of Discipline and Excellence

A fifth component to the renewal of the turnaround churches was the development of a culture of discipline and excellence. In many areas of congregational life, the plateaued or declining congregations were content to allow things to happen, to do little planning, and to encourage no accountability. One congregation was content with bland worship that just carried out the motions and a parsonage that was unlivable. Another congregation had a reputation of being a pastor killer and did little to discourage or dispute the characterization. Several congregations worshipped in shabby and rundown worship spaces because they did not believe that they had the resources to do anything with them.

Each of these congregations put aside their contentment with merely existing and allowing ministries, facilities, and events to be run in a halfhearted way. Pastors and leaders were willing to become accountable to one another. Pastors pressed leadership to new and higher goals. Leaders challenged one another to refuse to accept the status quo. Ministry leaders learned to give and expect the best to the glory of God. Each of these churches reflects what Rainer defines as a commitment to pleasing God—in a few areas (132). Like the truly great corporations written about in Collins, *Good to Great*, the renewed vitality congregations pursued excellence in the areas that complemented their Hedgehog Concept and refused to give or accept less than the best possible efforts.

Today's world expects quality in every aspect of life. Defective goods are returned. Food that is subpar is sent back to the kitchen. People demand excellence from

their coffee baristas, mechanics, physicians, and automobiles. Each congregation that would become vital again develops an insatiable hunger to reflect the excellence in all aspects of congregational life and ministry. Excellence in ministry and purpose in the turnaround church is empowered by the Holy Spirit and strive for to give ultimate glory to God.

Community Demographic

The finding of this study that was most surprising to me was the fact that community demographics make little difference in the ability of a small church to experience renewal. Of the six communities in which the study churches were located, three were declining, one was stable to slightly growing, and two communities were growing. Further, of the communities in which the control churches were located, one was declining, one was stable, and one was growing. The communities of the study churches included an urban church, a rural church, two churches in medium-sized towns and one church located in a small town. In each of these settings, the local congregation experienced renewal of vitality. The fact that churches in a variety of communities experienced renewal indicates that a church does not need to be located in a growing community in order to be renewed and revitalized. In fact, given that half of the communities around the renewed churches are declining, one may draw the conclusion that the struggles operative in situations of community decay may catalyze renewed vitality. This fact is a cause for great hope for congregations that are located in the middle of declining communities. Local churches do not need new people moving into the community to be vital. Small congregations do not need the unlimited resources that come with growing, affluent communities to be vital. Small churches can become vital

again by living faithfully the calling that God has given them to be a blessing to the world (Gen. 12:4). The very fact that the Church is exploding in third world areas, where people have significantly less, relative to most American settings, is testament to the ability of small churches to become vital again. Further, the six churches that I studied (as well as numerous others not identified) should serve as encouragement to small churches. Small churches can be vital outposts of the gospel of Jesus Christ in decaying communities. My research did not explore this possibility; therefore, I cannot categorically conclude such a correlation exists. The fact of the decline may only suggest a correlation between the struggles of decaying communities and the renewal of the congregations in those communities.

Limitations of the Study

Church vitality is a complex issue. This study could not account for all of the contributing factors to renewed vitality in small congregations. The renewal is a complex system of variables and catalysts that account for renewal of vitality. As I conducted the interviews, topics arose in discussion that I had not considered that may be significant to the renewal of a congregation.

A primary area of weakness in my study is the number of churches I was able to study and the number of subjects who provided research data. I severely underestimated the difficulty of obtaining responses from district superintendents identifying renewal churches to study. The study was further limited by the number of identified churches that either refused to participate (four) or were outside of the distance parameters I set (five) for inclusion in the study.

A procedural glitch became apparent to me as I conducted the on-site interviews.

Distribution of my research instrument seemed to be haphazard and difficult. Pastors indicated to me that many of the lay leaders who completed the surveys struggled with the intent and procedure of filling out the surveys. As I went to the study sites, I decided that I should have taken the surveys with me and allowed time for the leaders to complete the surveys while I was present to guide and instruct them. Had I been physically present to facilitate this step of my research, I would have eliminated some of the bad responses I received.

Statistical analysis of the responses to my research instrument revealed some weaknesses of the instrument. The fact that several of the categories of renewal had to be corrected by removing questions testifies to the need for better testing and development of the research instrument. When the statistical analysis software identified questions that created inconsistencies in the correlation structure and lowered the reliability of the data, I went to those questions and reread them. In several of those instances, I found that I had miscategorized the question in terms of its status as positive or negative. Further evidence of the limitation of my research instrument was the failure of normality testing in the MANOVA analysis. While the rigor of the MANOVA testing overcame the failure of normality, further development of my instrument could strengthen my findings.

By not including more questions dealing specifically with spiritual renewal and prayer as renewal catalysts, I failed to measure the full weight of these identified keys to renewal. Dr. Hegde suggested that if this instrument is to be used further, I should reduce the number of questions in each category. Reducing the number of questions on the survey would enable me to add a category for spiritual renewal as well as the other six categories. He felt that redesigning the survey in such a fashion would be a significant

improvement.

Suggestions for Future Study

One of the serious limitations of my study was the number of churches studied. This research would benefit by studying a greater number of renewed small churches across a greater geographic and cultural setting. The original projection included fifteen churches. In the end, only six churches participated. Studying additional churches would serve to strengthen the conclusion drawn by this study and could reveal those renewal characteristics that my limited study did not reveal.

A primary area for further research would be to investigate the contribution of the experience of the leadership to the renewal of the transformed congregations. I found nearly identical significance to the renewal indicated by the studied congregations and the renewal experienced by those with high experience. I did not expect this finding; consequently, I had no further methodology in place to analyze the contribution of experience to the renewal of the small congregations.

Another topic deserving of further investigation is the relationship among the pastor, the leadership team, and the congregation. While my research identifies the relationship between the pastor and the congregation as one of the critical components of renewal, many of the pastoral relationships of which I am aware are entered into quickly and seemingly almost by chance. The relationship between the pastor, the lay leaders and the congregation is an incredibly complex relationship. A church has a personality, needs, desires, culture and style among other characteristics. Not every pastor will be able to lead effectively in every setting. Similarly, a pastor has a personality, spiritual gifts, passions, leadership skills, and tastes that enhance or detract from his or her effectiveness

in a particular setting. This listing does not even begin to address the spiritual nature of leadership and the pastor/congregational calling and relationship. Research that focuses on how to create the best match between a pastor and a congregation would be most beneficial.

A further area of need is the exploration of further dynamics and catalysts for congregational transition. As I reflected on the data, my research builds on and confirms much of what others have written on the topic. However, I have only scratched the surface of understanding the transition process of moving from decline to vitality. Broadening the research base of this process would serve to clarify the complex topic of my study.

Recommendations

As I conclude this research study, several recommendations become apparent that would benefit the small church seeking renewal, the pastor longing to lead renewal, and the district and denominational leadership teams hoping to facilitate the renewal of small churches.

The leaders (both local and district) of churches seeking renewed vitality spend significant time, prayer, and effort in matching pastors to congregations. One of the two most significant factors to the renewal of small churches is the relationship between the pastor and the congregation. The relationship between the pastor and congregation will make or break a transition. Pastors should spend a significant amount of time in the community of the church learning about the culture and values of the people who live in the area. They should understand their own gifts, passions, talents, and strengths as well as how those tools that would be used in the ministry context. Churches need to own up

to the reality of the situation that they face. They need to know (or be told) what they *really* need in their pastors. Both pastor and parishioner should seek the face of God before making any decision. Only when the match between pastor and congregation is made well that renewal can occur in a lasting way in a local congregation.

Churches that wish to experience renewed vitality would do well to return to the basics of spirituality, a vertical relationship with God that is lived in horizontal relationship with others in community. The renewal trait that is missing in far too many small congregations is a dynamic, love relationship with God that is characterized by personal prayer and devotion. If the preponderance of relationships with God are lukewarm, the church will be lukewarm. A lukewarm church is resistant and inhospitable to renewal of vision, focus, and mission. The interpersonal relationships of people who are being renewed in their relationship with God will be warm, growing, and mutually supportive. The only program that will make a lasting, qualitative difference in the life of the local church is one that renews and refires passionate spirituality.

Churches that experience renewal get involved in the community in which they exist. God has called a local church to be his agent of renewal in a specific local community where the greatest potential for effective ministry lies. Only as those who lead the church understand and have compassion for those in their community who stand outside of relationship with Jesus Christ can they create and implement effective ministries. The calling of God to his church is to be his witnesses, at home, down the road, and over the seas (see Acts 1:8). Involvement in a local community is the key to refocusing a small church outward. People who see the needs, who are being transformed by their relationship with God, will be captivated by the needs and will be moved with

the same compassion that moves the heart of God.

In order to create an environment of passion and joy, churches seeking vitality celebrate the unique strengths of the small membership church. A small church is not necessarily a large church in the making. A small church is a unique tool created by God to fill a unique niche of ministry in the world. Small churches can be great expressions of the body of Christ. The calling is to celebrate the uniqueness of the small church and to enable the small church to live its calling and realize its potential in Jesus Christ through the power of his Holy Spirit.

Postscript

Having completed this research, I find that small churches continue to occupy a special place in my heart and in my thinking. The burden that I have carried to see small churches realize their potential in the kingdom and in the world has grown exponentially. Because of the research, I find that I grieve more deeply those small churches that struggle and slowly decline. This project has deeply and profoundly affected the faith that I have in the small church and God's plan for them. I have been in six churches that have experienced amazing transformation. They have stood on death's door and faced their own extinction. Against all odds, they have not only survived, they have been transformed into an effective tool in the hands of God that is making a difference in the world. I have a renewed faith God's plan for small churches is that they become vital, loving, caring, and sharing communities of faith who faithfully live out the Great Commission in the communities in which they exist. My prayer is that I will be an agent that affects the renewal of many small congregations.

APPENDIX A

CONGREGATIONAL QUESTIONNAIRE

UNDERSTANDING HOW YOUR CHURCH BECAME VITAL AGAIN

Instructions: This survey is designed to understand the process that your church implemented to become a vital congregation. The entire survey should take between 15 and 20 minutes to complete. Your identity and answers will remain anonymous. For the best results, please complete the survey quickly without pausing to consider any one item in depth. Thank you for your participation.

1. Name of your church? _____
2. Name of the town in which your church is located? _____
3. Gender
 - 3.1. _____ Male
 - 3.2. _____ Female
4. Marital Status
 - 4.1. _____ Single
 - 4.2. _____ Married
 - 4.3. _____ Widowed
 - 4.4. _____ Other
5. Number of Children _____
6. Which best describes your current involvement with this church?
 - 6.1. _____ Attendee only
 - 6.2. _____ Church member
 - 6.3. _____ Leadership board member
 - 6.4. _____ Ministry leader/teacher/staff
 - 6.5. _____ Pastoral staff
7. Approximately how many years have you been involved with this local church?

8. If you are a member of the leadership team, church board or are a ministry leader, what is your position?
9. In the past year, approximately what percentage of your total income from all sources did you give to your local church? _____%
10. The current staff, for the ministries of your church is...? (check one)
 - 10.1. _____ Understaffed
 - 10.2. _____ Adequate
 - 10.3. _____ Overstaffed
11. I actively participate in a small group or ministry team
 - 11.1. _____ Yes
 - 11.2. _____ No
12. How would you describe the community within which your church is located? (check one)
 - 12.1. _____ Growing and Thriving
 - 12.2. _____ Plateaued
 - 12.3. _____ Declining

Instructions: Using the scale provided below, circle the number beside each statement which corresponds most nearly to your assessment of that aspect of your church's transition.

1= Strongly Agree 2=Agree 3= Somewhat Agree 4=Neutral 5=Disagree 6=Somewhat Disagree 7=Strongly Disagree NA=Not Applicable

13. Few people in our church are regularly involved in consistent, intentional prayer efforts for our church's spiritual needs.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
14. Our church has a clear understanding of the purpose for our church's existence.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
15. Reflecting on my growth over the last ten years, I have personally experience a renewal of my relationship with Jesus Christ.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
16. Generally speaking, the majority of the vision, the programming, and the direction of our church come from the professional, credentialed clergy who serve our church.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA

17. The organization of our church makes it easy to carry out our mission in our community.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
18. Few people in our church are regularly involved in ministries that reach out to and seek to meet the needs evident within the community in which we exist.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
19. Those involved in the lay leadership of our church know their spiritual gifts and minister using those gifts.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
20. The mission and purpose of our church are written statements that have little impact on the planning process, priorities, and operation of our church.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
21. Our church emphasizes the person and presence of the Holy Spirit.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
22. Few people in our congregation know their spiritual gifts and passions.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
23. Our church is committed to touching our community more that preserving the traditions of the past.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
24. Our pastor(s) has regularly preached about and communicated a clear vision of ministry for our church.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
25. I have more close friends within this local congregation today than I did ten years ago.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
26. Small groups have NOT played a significant role in our church's vitality over the last ten years.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
27. My major role in the congregation is to see that I am as spiritually mature as I can be.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
28. During the last ten years, we have become aware that the way we had been doing ministry was no longer relevant to our community.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
29. Our church's worship is relevant to the culture in which our church exists.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
30. My relationship with Jesus Christ is qualitatively much the same as it was ten years ago.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
31. Discovering and clarifying our mission and purpose has little to do with the vitality and ministry success that our church has experienced over the last ten years.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
32. Our church's worship has grown in passion, depth, and meaning.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA

33. The majority of the lay leaders in our congregation are concerned with identifying and meeting the needs of our community.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
34. The members of this local congregation have shown little spiritual growth in their personal relationship with Jesus Christ over the last ten years.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
35. Reflecting on my spiritual growth over the last ten years, my personal prayer life is more active, more powerful, and more dynamic now.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
36. Significant leadership in our congregation now comes from laypeople and volunteer staff.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
37. Discovering our purpose for existence and ministry revitalized our church.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
38. Our worship services have changed little in style and content over the last ten years.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
39. The organization of our church makes it easy for me to carry out the ministry to which God has called me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
40. My personal understanding of God's calling on my life has grown over the past ten years.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
41. As a church, we are more concerned about surviving and keeping the doors open that we are about living out a mission.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
42. I see no need to belong to a small group.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
43. The structure of our church is confusing and hinders the development of new ministries that respond to the needs of our community.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
44. This congregation has seen damaged relationships reconciled and friendships reborn.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
45. Lay leaders fill leadership positions in our church with little thought to an individual's spiritual gifts and passions.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
46. Our church is known in our community for the love that it shares with those outside of our church.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
47. We do not have adequate programs or resources to meet the needs that God is revealing to us in our local community	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA

48. The pastors and leaders of our congregation rarely speak of, preach about, or explain our purpose and mission.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
49. Our church consistently reaches out to and meets the needs of people who are not like us.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
50. Generally speaking, the individuals who are in leadership positions in our church are in the same leaders who were in positions of leadership ten years ago.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
51. We rarely see people who are not like us worship with us, fellowship with us, and become a valued part of our congregational life.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
52. As a general statement, I am more on fire for God and more passionate about my relationship with him than I was prior to our church's transition.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
53. The various ministries of our church are extensions of our understanding of the unique mission that to which God has called us.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
54. A significant part of our church's strategy is the implementation of a clear, simple, and intentional process of discipleship and spiritual growth.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
55. I am personally more committed to Jesus Christ today than I was prior to our church's transition to vitality.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
56. Lay leaders are encouraged to develop vision and contribute to the overall vision for ministry in this congregation.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
57. Our past history and tradition motivates us to continue our mission to the lost in the future.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
58. The primary focus of our church is meeting the needs of the people who call this church home.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
59. During the last ten years, I have seen little evidence that God is moving in deeper ways in my life.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
60. Our leadership team has worked to create a program and structure that is flexible enough to allow us to grow beyond current ministry levels.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
61. The organizational structure of our church is inflexible and rigid and has little to do with advancing our mission and purpose.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
62. The leadership of our congregation is held by relatively few people relative to the size of our congregation.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA

63. The leadership of our church rarely considers the needs of our community when creating ministries, setting policies or allocating budgeted monies.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
64. Our concern for the mission of our church has led to tangible ministries of love within our community during the past ten years.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
65. Our purpose and mission statements have little to do with how decisions are made, policies are set, and monies are spent in our congregation.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
66. Our church has created multiple opportunities for our members to be involved in our community and to minister to it.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
67. The majority of our lay leaders are especially concerned to see that the ministers and ministries of our church serve the membership of our congregation.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
68. I have fewer close friends within this local congregation than I did ten years ago.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
69. Part of the success of our church is that we identified the needs of our community and developed ministries to meet those specific needs.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
70. Over the last ten years, we had few opportunities to minister directly to the community in which we lived.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
71. Few people understand or know our church's mission statement.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA
72. Few people in our congregation are engaged in regular, intentional discipleship activities such as small groups, Bible study groups or personal Bible study programs.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 NA

APPENDIX B

LIST OF VITAL TRANSITION QUESTIONS ACCORDING TO

CHARACTERISTIC

Personal Renewal (15, 25, 35, 52, 55 Stated positively 27, 30, 42, 59, 68 Stated negatively)

15. Reflecting on my growth over the last ten years, I have personally experienced a renewal of my relationship with Jesus Christ. (Spiritual)

25. I have more close friends within this local congregation today than I did ten years ago. (Relational)

27. My major role in the congregation is to see that I am as spiritually mature as I can be. (Community)

30. My relationship with Jesus Christ is much the same as it was ten years ago. (Spiritual)

35. Reflecting on my spiritual growth over the last ten years, my personal prayer life is more active, more powerful, and more dynamic now. (Prayer)

42. I see no need to belong to a small group. (Discipleship)

52. As a general statement, I am more on fire for God and more passionate about my relationship with him than I was ten years ago. (Spiritual)

55. I am personally more committed to Jesus Christ today than I was prior to our church's transition to vitality. (Spiritual)

59. During the last ten years, I have seen little evidence that God is moving in deeper ways in my life. (Spiritual)

68. As a rule, I have fewer friends within this local congregation than I did ten years ago. (Relational)

Corporate Renewal (21, 29, 32, 44, 54 Stated Positively; 13, 26, 34, 38, 72 Stated Negatively)

13. Few people in our church are regularly involved in regular, intentional prayer efforts for our church's spiritual needs. (Prayer)

21. Our church emphasizes the person and presence of the Holy Spirit. (Spiritual)

26. Small groups have NOT played a significant role in our church's vitality over the last ten years. (Relational/Discipleship)

29. Our church's worship is relevant to the culture in which our church exists. (Worship)

32. Our church's worship has grown in passion, depth and meaning. (Worship)

34. The members of this local congregation have shown little spiritual growth in their personal relationship and their relationship with Jesus Christ over the last ten years.

(Spiritual/Relational)

38. Our worship services have changed little in style and content over the last ten years.

(Worship)

44. This congregation has seen damaged relationships reconciled and friendships reborn.

(Relational)

54. A significant part of our church's strategy is the implementation of a clear, simple and intentional process of discipleship and spiritual growth. (Discipleship)

72. Few people in our congregation are engaged in regular, intentional discipleship activities such as small groups, Bible study groups or personal Bible study programs.

(Discipleship)

Conceptual Renewal (14, 24, 37, 40, 53; Stated Positively; 20, 31, 48, 65, 71 Stated Negatively)

- 14. Our church has a clear understanding of the purpose for our church's existence.
- 20. The mission and purpose of our church are written statements that have little impact on the planning process, priorities and operation of our church.
- 24. Our pastor(s) has regularly preached about and communicated a clear vision of ministry for our church.
- 31. Discovering and clarifying our mission and purpose has little to do with the vitality and ministry success that our church has experience over the last ten years.
- 37. Discovering our purpose for existence and ministry revitalized our church.
- 40. My personal understanding of God's calling on my life has grown over the past ten years.
- 48. The pastors and leaders of our congregation rarely speak of, preach about, or explain our purpose and mission.
- 53. The various ministries of our church are extensions of our understanding of the unique mission that God has called us to.
- 65. Our purpose and mission statements have little to do with how decisions are made, policies are set and monies are spent in our congregation.
- 71. Few people understand or know our church's mission statement.

Structural Renewal (17, 28, 39, 60, 69; Stated Positively; 23, 43, 47, 61, 63 Stated Negatively)

17. The organization of our church makes it easy to carry out our mission in our community.

23. Our church is committed to preserving the traditions of the past and securing the

ongoing existence of this local congregation.

28. During the last ten years, we have become aware that the way we had been doing ministry was no longer relevant to our community.

39. The organization of our church makes it easy for me to carry out the ministry to which God has called me.

43. The structure of our church is confusing and hinders the development of new ministries that speak to the needs of our community.

47. We do not have adequate programs or resources to meet the needs that God is revealing to us in our local community.

60. Our leadership team has worked to create a program and structure which is flexible enough to allow us to grow beyond current ministry levels.

61. The organizational structure of our church is inflexible and rigid and has little to do with advancing our mission and purpose.

63. The leadership of our church rarely considers the needs of our community when creating ministries, setting policies or allocating budgeted monies.

69. Part of the success of our church is that we identified the needs of our community and developed ministries to meet those specific needs.

Missional Renewal (46, 49, 57, 64, 66 Stated Positively; 18, 41, 51, 58, 70 Stated Negatively)

18. Few people in our church are regularly involved in ministries that reach out to and seek to meet the needs evident within the community in which we exist.

41. As a church, we are more concerned about surviving and keeping the doors open than

we were with living out our mission.

46. Our church is known in our community for the love that it shares with those outside of our church.

49. Our church consistently reaches out to and meets the needs of people who are not like us.

51. We rarely see people who are not like us worship with us, fellowship with us and become a valued part of our congregational life.

57. Our past history and tradition motivates us to continue our mission to the lost in the future.

58. The primary focus of our church is meeting the needs of the people who call this church home.

64. Our concern for the mission of our church has led to tangible ministries of love within our community during the past ten years.

66. Our church has created multiple opportunities for our members to be involved in our community and to minister to it.

70. Over the last ten years, we have had few opportunities to minister directly to the community in which we lived.

Lay Leadership Renewal (19, 22, 33, 36, 56 Stated Positively; 16, 45, 50, 62, 67 Stated Negatively)

16. Generally speaking, the majority of the vision, programming and direction of our church comes from the professional, credentialed clergy who serve our church.

19. Those involved in the lay leadership of our church know their spiritual gifts and

minister using those gifts.

22. Few people know their personal spiritual gifts and passions.

33. The majority of the lay leaders in our congregation are concerned with identifying and meeting the needs of our community.

36. Significant leadership in our congregation now comes from laypeople and volunteer staff.

45. Lay leaders fill positions in our church with little thought to spiritual gifts and talents.

50. Generally speaking, the individuals who are in leadership positions in our church are the same leaders who were in positions of leadership ten years ago.

56. Lay leaders are encouraged to develop vision and contribute to the overall vision for ministry in this congregation.

62. The leadership of our congregation is held by relatively few people relative to the size of our congregation.

67. The majority of our lay leaders are especially concerned to see that the ministers and ministries of our church serve the membership of our congregation.

APPENDIX C
PASTORAL QUESTIONNAIRE
CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

This survey should be completed by the senior pastor or a designated leader. Thank you for participating. Your answers will provide valuable information about your local context. Please answer the questions to the best of your ability.

1. What is the name of your church? _____
2. What is the name of the town in which your church is located?

3. How long have you served as the senior or lead pastor of this congregation?
 (Circle one)
 0-2 Years 3-6 Years 7-10 Years 10-15 Years Over 15 Years
4. What is the age of your church facility? (Circle one)
 1-10 Years 11-20 Years 21-30 Years 31-40 Years Over 41 Years
5. Approximately how many parking spaces does your facility have on-site? _____
6. How large is the population within 20 minutes average driving distance from your church? (Circle one)
 Under 15,000 15,000-50,000 50,000-100,000 100,000-500,000 Over 500,000
7. Is the population base within 20 minutes average driving distance from your church generally... (Circle one)
 Declining Stable Growing
8. What was the average morning worship attendance for the following years?
 2007 _____

2006 _____

2005 _____

2004 _____

2003 _____

2002 _____

2001 _____

2000 _____

1999 _____

1998 _____

9. How many conversions occurred in the following years?

2007 _____

2006 _____

2005 _____

2004 _____

2003 _____

2002 _____

2001 _____

2000 _____

1999 _____

1998 _____

10. What was the membership recorded in the following years?

2007 _____

2006 _____

2005 _____

2004 _____

2003 _____

2002 _____

2001 _____

2000 _____

1999 _____

1998 _____

11. Estimate how many people were involved in regular lay ministry opportunities during the following years?

2007 _____

2006 _____

2005 _____

2004 _____

2003 _____

2002 _____

2001 _____

2000 _____

1999 _____

1998 _____

12. What is your current composite ministry total?

Local Composite ministry today is the total of:

Average of Morning Worship attendance _____

Average of Sunday School attendance _____

Average of Evening Ministry Attendance _____

Average of Weekly Bible Studies _____

Midweek Ministries (Caravan, Children, Teens etc.) _____

Radio or TV Ministries (best estimate of audience) _____

Off Campus Services (Nursing home, prison, etc.) _____

Day Care or Preschool Chapels _____

Compassionate Ministries (Food/Clothing Pantry etc.) _____

Outreach Ministries (outside of the church, not covered) _____

TOTAL COMPOSITE MINISTRY INDEX _____

13. How many persons were called to professional ministry in the past ten years from this congregation?

14. How many persons were trained for ministries in the following years?

2007 _____

2006 _____

2005 _____

2004 _____

2003 _____

2002 _____

2001 _____

2000 _____

1999 _____

1998 _____

APPENDIX D

PASTORAL LEADERSHIP ON SITE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

[To be read to each interviewee.] These questions are being asked of the pastors of churches that have been identified as small churches who have made the transition from decline or plateau to vitality. The results of this interview will be recorded. The sessions will then be transcribed and coded for analysis by my Research Reflection Team.

In order to keep all interviews standard each major question will be read verbatim. Follow-up questions will be used to clarify the direction of the conversation and the researcher's intent. I have no set length to the interview or response. Responses may be as long or as short as the interviewee desires.

[Note to the interviewer.] Please stop the tape and check the volume reception level after the first questions to ensure a quality recording, and then proceed.

Background Questions

1. How long were you the pastor of this congregation before the transition to vitality began to occur?
2. How old were you when you assumed the pastorate at this congregation?

[Stop the tape and check the reception level. Make sure that you do not record over the first two answers when beginning again.]

3. How many churches did you pastor prior to this one?
4. Are you a full-time pastor or bi-vocational?
5. If you are bi-vocational, how many hours each week do you work outside of the church setting?

Content Questions

Question #1: Please describe the condition of your church before the transition began.

Follow-up Questions: (1) What was the primary purpose and focus of your church?

(2) How has the spiritual climate of your church grown during the transition?

Question #2: How would you describe your church now?

Follow-up Questions: (1) What are the two or three most important priorities of your church?

(2) What kinds of ministries and programs were operational?

Question #3: Think back across the process of becoming vital again, please describe the transition process.

Follow-up Questions: (1) How long did the process take?

(2) What were the key changes?

(3) Was the transition primarily a spontaneous renewal or was it a discovery followed by a strategic plan?

(4) Who were the key people involved?

(5) What were the barriers?

- How were those barriers overcome?

(6) What was your role in the transition?

Question #4: How would you describe your leadership style throughout the leadership process?

Question #5: How has your church's vision and focus changed throughout this process?

Question #6: What event or discovery led to the awareness that your congregation needed to radically change?

APPENDIX E

LAY LEADERSHIP ON-SITE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

[To be read to each interviewee.] These questions are being asked of the lay leaders of churches that have been identified as small churches who have made the transition from decline or plateau to vitality. The results of this interview will be recorded. The sessions will then be transcribed and coded for analysis by my Research Reflection Team.

In order to keep all interviews standard each major question will be read verbatim. Follow-up questions will be used to clarify the direction of the conversation and the researcher's intent. I have no set length to the interview or response. Responses may be as long or as short as the interviewee desires.

[Note to the interviewer.] Please stop the tape and check the volume reception level after the first question to insure a quality recording, and then proceed.

Content Questions

Question #1: How would you describe your church before it became as vital as it is today?

[Stop the tape and check the reception level. Make sure that you do not record over the first two answers when beginning again.]

Follow-up Questions: (1) What was the primary purpose and focus of your

church?

(2) What kinds of ministries and programs were operational?

Question #2: How would you characterize your church today?

Follow-up Question: (1) What are the two or three most important priorities of your church?

(2) How has the spiritual climate of your church grown during the transition?

Question #3: What are the most significant differences between your church today and your church before it became vital?

Question #4: Think back across the process of becoming vital again, please describe the transition process.

Follow-up Questions: (1) How long did the process take?

(2) What were the key changes?

(3) Was the transition primarily a spontaneous renewal or was it a discovery followed by a strategic plan?

(4) Who were the key people involved?

(5) What were the barriers?

- How were those barriers overcome?

(6) What was your role in the transition?

Question #5: How would you describe your pastor's leadership through the transition process?

Follow-up Questions: (1) Can you think of times when ideas or concepts failed during the transition?

(2) How did your pastor deal with failure?

Question #6: How would you describe your role in your church becoming a vital congregation?

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW CODING FOR ON-SITE INTERVIEWS

Evaluate the pastor's leadership style and character related to Rainer's Acts 6/7 qualities:

1	Knows of God's call to ministry and has responded to that call
2	Takes time to do well the basics of Christian Ministry
3	Seeks to lead church and self to ministry beyond the walls of the church
4	Exudes a contagious enthusiasm for ministry; others gladly follow
5	Is willing to take risks; where success is only possible in God's power
6	Has a burden for a successful ministry beyond his own tenure
7	Exhibits fierce biblical faithfulness
8	Possesses a strong sense of personal responsibility when things go badly
9	Consistently finds ways to communicate the love that they have for their congregation
10	Possessed a strong personal humility yet is confident in her leadership
11	Persistent in pursuit of goals and purposes to realize vision

Evaluate the congregation's awareness of the central organizational and ministry purpose defined by Collins as their Hedgehog Concept and Rainer as their Vision Intersection Profile

12	Overtly aware of leadership passion
13	Intentionally aware of congregation's gifts and passions

14	Clearly aware of the specific needs of the community in which the congregation exists
----	---

Evaluate the congregation's experience in confronting the reality of their need of turn around

15	The church and its leadership became acutely aware that they were not living in the reality of what God wanted them to be
16	The leadership team confronted the brutal facts of the church's reality with a strong belief that God could use them to turn around the situation
17	After change began a crisis took place in the hearts of the leaders and/or the members of the church

Evaluate the development of the congregation's culture of discipline and excellence

18	The church and its leadership became unwilling to accept the status quo
19	Practices were developed that measured the ministry efforts
20	The pastor and leaders expect excellence in effort and ministry

Evaluate the congregation's transformation in worship

21	Worship services exhibit passion and routinely experience the presence of God
----	---

22	The church's worship intentionally engages the culture in which the congregation exists
23	The congregation's worship is centered on God

Evaluate the congregation's ministry structures

24	The ministry structures employed by the congregation are simple and enable each member to use their gifts in ministry
25	The members of the congregation know and use their spiritual gifts and passion to further the ministry of the church
26	The ministry structures enhance the ministry ability of the church
27	Members of the church have significant voice in the decisions made by the leadership
28	Budgets, calendars, and ministries are well planned, well communicated, and well executed

Evaluate the congregation's relational structure

29	Each member participates regularly in a small group
30	Discipleship occurs within the context of small relational groupings
31	Many members are involved in caring for the sick, the lonely, the prisoner and the needy
32	Visitation is practiced by members of the congregation as well as by the

	pastor and leadership team
33	The church is characterized by an atmosphere of love and acceptance

Evaluate the congregation's missional involvement

34	The church and its leadership convey a vision which consistently focuses upon ministry outside of the church setting
35	The congregation's priority is upon finding avenues of ministry which impact the community in which it exists
36	Members of the congregation are regularly involved in ministry efforts in the community
37	A significant portion of the church's operating budget is designated for outside ministry support and development
38	The congregation exhibits a culture of evangelism and outreach

Evaluate the congregation's emphasis on corporate prayer as a catalyst for renewal

39	The pastor, lay leadership and members recognize prayer as an essential component of the process of transition
----	--

APPENDIX G

TRANSITION THEORY CORRELATION GRID

Snyder-Crandall	Collins	Rainer	Callahan	Macchia	NCD
Leadership renewal	Level 5 leader	Acts 6/7 leader	Strong leadership	Servant leadership development	Empowering leadership
	First who then what	What/who simultrack	Participatory decision making	Wise administration and accountability	
Conceptual renewal	Confront the brutal facts	The ABC (awareness, belief, crisis) Moment			
	Hedgehog Concept	The VIP Factor	Specific Concrete Missional Objectives		
Corporate personal renewal	Culture of discipline	Culture of excellence	Corporate/Dynamic Worship	God's empowering presence	Inspiring worship services
			Significant Relational Groups	God-exalting worship	Passionate spirituality
				Spiritual Disciplines	Gift-oriented ministry
				Stewardship and Generosity	
				Learning and growing in community A commitment to loving and caring relationships	Holistic small groups Loving relationships
Structural renewal	Technology accelerators	Innovation accelerators	Several competent programs and activities		Functional structures
	Fly wheel and doom loop	Big Mo or blind erosion	Streamlined structure		
			Pastoral/lay visitation		
			High visibility		
			Adequate land/parking/landscaping		
			Adequate space and facilities		
Missional Renewal			Solid financial resources		
	Hedgehog Concept	The VIP Factor	Specific concrete missional objectives	An outward focus	Need-oriented evangelism
			Open accessibility		

APPENDIX H

LETTER TO DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS

July 24, 2008

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ.

Please allow me to introduce myself. I am a pastor in the Church of the Nazarene (on the Mid-Atlantic District). For twenty years, I have been pastoring small churches. I have a heart and desire to see the small church become all that it can be and to realize the vision that God has that the small church be the beacon of God's love and grace in the communities in which they reside.

As a part of my Doctor of Ministry Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary, I am attempting to identify and study small churches that had previously been stalled or declining and have exhibited a transition to vitality. The purpose of my study is to identify the transition characteristics of vital small Nazarene Churches.

I am seeking to identify those small churches that have transitioned from being stalled or decline to vitality. I am seeking your assistance in identifying those churches. Please return the included sheets (or email the response to me at revart@hughes.net) identifying these churches. I have included a self-addressed stamped envelope to make it easier for you to return the identification sheet.

I am seeking to identify vital small churches. I am defining a vital small church as a church that is actively and intentionally pursuing the mission of the gospel of Jesus Christ to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all that he has taught in accordance with Matthew 28:20 This vitality results in believers coming to faith,

believers being intentionally disciplined and intentionally involved in the ministry of the local church, and a focus on the community as the primary place for that ministry to occur.

I am requesting that you use the following criteria to identify the turnaround small churches:

- The church must have been stalled or declining prior to experiencing vitality
- The turnaround must have continued for at least 5 years
- The vitality should generally exhibit the following characteristics
 - New believers coming to faith
 - Believers engaging in intentional discipleship and disciple-making activities
 - An intentional missional focus which seeks to engage the community in which the church exists
 - Ministry opportunities which meet current needs of that community
 - A relative degree of unity
 - Meaningful worship services

My prayer is that this project will assist other small churches to realize their potential and calling to become vital again and influence their world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Thank you for your assistance.

Arthur T. Roxby, III

APPENDIX I

LETTERS TO PASTORS OF IDENTIFIED CHURCHES

December 5, 2008

Dear _____,

I offer you greetings in the wonderful name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior! My prayer for you that this day finds you well and blessed by the presence of his Holy Spirit in your life, in your home and in your ministry.

I would like to begin by thanking you for agreeing to participate in my doctoral research project. I pray that this research will be a blessing to our church and to small churches for years to come. Small churches have been a part of God's plan for blessing the world with his great salvation since the beginning of the Christian church.

Enclosed in this packet you will find the following:

- (1) One pastor's contextual analysis survey
- (15) Fifteen congregational leadership surveys
- (1) One self-addressed stamped return envelope

I would ask that the lead pastor fill out the pastor's contextual survey, if possible. If some of the data is not readily available, use N/A to indicate that fact.

Please distribute the leadership surveys to all church board members (past as well as present), Sunday school board members, as well as any other key leaders who were involved in the transition that your congregation experienced. Ask them to take the questions at face value. Don't try to read too much into the question. Go with their first

gut instinct. Could you please point out the scale to them? A 1 rating indicates strongly agree, a 7 rating indicates strongly disagree and N/A indicates that that question is not applicable in their eyes.

Please feel free to make more copies of the survey as needed. More people completing the survey yields greater accuracy of the response analysis.

Upon receipt of the completed surveys, please return them to me in the SASE for processing.

If you have any questions regarding the survey or the administration of this survey, please feel free to contact me at the indicated email address or telephone numbers.

Again, thank you for participating in my research.

His and yours for the Kingdom,

Rev. Arthur T. Roxby, III

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