Abstract

This study examined turnaround churches within the California-Nevada Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. Turnaround churches were identified as those with an average worship attendance between 50 and 200 as of 1990, which were either declining or plateaued for the period 1984-1990, but experienced growth of 50 percent or more for the period 1990-1996 as measured by average worship attendance. Of the 377 churches in the conference, five churches plus the church pastored by the researcher satisfied these parameters. Personal interviews of laity and clergy were used to assess factors contributing to plateau and decline and factors leading to turnaround and growth in these five churches. The researcher's church was used for pretesting and for comparision.

The study revealed that the following factors, listed in order of significance, contributed to plateau and decline: weak pastoral leadership, clergy sexual misconduct, the absence of a Biblical focus, weak preaching, the absence of planning or goal setting, the absence of young people and children, and facility problems. The most significant factor contributing to turnaround and growth was strong pastoral leadership which possessed the following qualities: positive personality, good preaching skills, vision and planning skills, being accessible to the congregation, and modeling faithfulness. In addition to strong pastoral leadership, other significant factors were: the creation of new worship services, attracting young people and children, quality ministerial staff, the creation of small groups, renewal programs such as Walk to Emmaus, Promise Keepers, and Disciple Bible Study, and the development of lay leadership.

The findings of the study revealed, contrary to the opinion of many West Coast United Methodist pastors, that the church growth methods and tools used successfully in the five turnaround churches were very consistent with those identified as most significant by the larger body of church growth research.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

TURNAROUND UNITED METHODIST CHURCHES

IN THE CALIFORNIA-NEVADA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

presented by

David Lewis Samelson

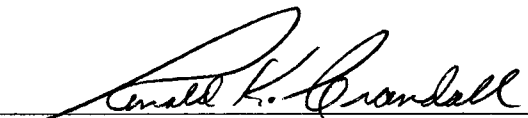Has been accepted toward fulfillment

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TURNAROUND UNITED METHODIST CHURCHES

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A Dissertation

presented to

the Faculty of Asbury Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

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David Lewis Samelson

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

Acknowledgments

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CHAPTER 1

Understanding the Problem

My entire ministry has occurred during a period of numerical decline within the United Methodist Church. The California-Nevada Annual Conference, where I have served the past last ten years, paralleled the denomination in this decline. Only my colleagues close to retirement have any memory of pastoral ministry during a time in which growth was the norm in the conference. Laity, as well as clergy, have become accustomed to decline. Most churches do not expect to grow. For many, a maintenance mindset long ago replaced a missional-evangelistic perspective for the church.

Yreka United Methodist Church

I have served as pastor of Yreka United Methodist Church since July of 1992. Yreka is a community of 8,000 in the sparsely populated north central region of California. While timber industry employment, its main industry historically, has decreased, tourism, retail, and light manufacturing have offset timber job losses. The community has had slow population growth for decades. Like many areas in rural Northern California, Yreka has experienced an influx of retirees from Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay area.

The Yreka UMC's average worship attendance peaked in the early 1960s at approximately 150. In the late 1960s it declined and remained plateaued near 100 through the 1970s and 1980s. My immediate predecessor, who served two years (1990-92), brought strong preaching skills and the church began to grow. This growth has continued. Over the last eight years, worship attendance has steadily increased from 83 to 203, where it currently stands. Sunday school

attendance has increased from thirty-nine to sixty-three, and the number of persons joining in membership has increased from an average of nine per year (for the six years 1985-1990) to an average of eighteen per year (for the six years 1991-1997). The average age of the congregation dropped precipitously. One longtime older member recently said, "A few years ago on Sunday morning it was nothing but gray hair and I felt that when those of us my age died--the church would die as well. I don't feel that way anymore!"

Through the last eight years a number of changes have taken place. Most of these changes fall into three categories.

Worship

Worship is the central spiritual and social event in the life of Yreka United Methodist. The church's turnaround is directly related to the changes that have taken place over the last six years.

Little change was made in worship in my first two years at Yreka. With a strong emphasis on preaching clear and relevant biblical sermons, worship attendance began to grow (from 112 to 155). The addition of young families was a significant part of this growth.

Music was the first important area of change in worship. As a number of people in the church experienced contemporary music through the Walk to Emmaus (described in the next section) the desire to bring this music into our worship began to increase. Yet this was not an easy process. Tension immediately swelled when a small worship band began playing one or two songs each week. Detractors referred to the group as "the jug band" and a number of loud voices proclaimed, "That music doesn't belong in church." A few people left,

but most remained—as did the music. One positive outcome of the tension was that it forced the group of us who led contemporary music to take great care in bringing into worship only the very best (and most singable) contemporary songs. Gradually the number of detractors decreased.

Two years ago, prompted primarily by concerns of overcrowding but also by lingering tensions around music, we added a new 9:00 a.m. contemporary service, and made the 11:00 a.m. service more traditional in style. The 9:00 a.m. service began with a fifteen-minute long opening time of singing contemporary praise music with the lyrics projected on a screen. In addition to the instrumentalist we added four vocalists to lead the songs. This 9:00 a.m. service, which offered Sunday school concurrently, was an immediate success, averaging 130 through its first year. To address concerns of unity both services came together for a combined worship service quarterly. These combined services, blended in style, became times of celebration; they consistently packed the church.

The downside of adding a new service was that the two services divided along generational lines: the 9:00 a.m. consisting of mostly persons under 50; the 11:00 a.m. consisting mostly of persons over 60. In addition, while the 9:00 a.m. service was growing, the 11:00 a.m. service was slowly declining. Largely through seeing the long-term negative effects of this pattern in one of the churches studied through this dissertation project, I led the church through an examination process that resulted in our current worship configuration of two blended worship services. This process of change, actually prompted by the findings of this study, is described in detail at the conclusion of Chapter 5.

The church has grown a great deal through this bumpy process of trial and error. In addition, we also discovered more clearly our identity as a church. This was shared recently in our church newsletter:

> We are a church in which seniors seek to be with younger persons and children, and vice-a-versa. We are a church in which younger persons and children will sing hymns, because they allow many seniors in our church to truly worship God. We are a church in which seniors will sing praise choruses, because they allow many younger persons and children to truly worship God. In doing so, we believe that we consistently get back far more than we give up. (Yreka)

The entire church was actively involved in the decision-making process through each of our big changes in worship. This not only increased the congregation's ownership of the decisions, but led to greater lay participation in worship. While the changes have been stressful, with each one the church saw a significant jump in the number of people worshipping God each week.

The Walk to Emmaus

Over the last six years, Walk to Emmaus retreats have transformed the spiritual vitality of the church. At present ninety people, about a third of the adult congregation, have gone on Walk to Emmaus spiritual renewal weekends and most return with a new or greatly deepened personal relationship with Christ. Some of the most dramatic changes occurred in long-time members of the church. These testimonies in particular challenge those with a more nominal faith.

Yreka UMC has also been a key church in the formation of a new Walk to Emmaus Community. Mountain Trails Walk to Emmaus covers the region of Southern Oregon and the northernmost region of California. I served as the spiritual director of this new community for the last four years and a number of persons from the church have served on the board of directors. Our church has

hosted three Walks with little negative resistance from members of the church who have so far chosen not to participate in the Walk to Emmaus. A monthly Walk to Emmaus gathering for singing and communion draws between twenty and fifty people. The majority of the new music sung in worship comes from the songbook used in the Walk to Emmaus.

Small Groups

A number of small group ministries have been started over the last six years. Close to twenty people are involved in Covenant Discipleship Groups, based on Wesley's class meeting and reintroduced to the church by the work of David Lowes Watson. Disciple Bible Study began in the fall of 1996 with sixteen people and has grown each year since. This high commitment program has become a natural next step for persons who have returned from the Walk to Emmaus. The Promise Keeper's stadium events have prompted a group of six men to form a local weekly Promise Keepers group, the first men's group in the church other than United Methodist Men. In addition, a wide array of short-term Bible studies and classes now meet on a regular basis. Four years ago a quarter-time Christian education coordinator position was created to nurture both the Sunday school and our growing small group ministries. An education building built in 1987 is now used at capacity.

<div align="center">Seeking to Understand the Causes of Growth</div>

In 1995 Yreka was on the list of the twenty fastest growing churches in the conference, a first. The publishing of this list throughout the conference resulted in colleagues inquiring about the reasons for Yreka's growth.

I usually responded in two ways: (1) I described the three areas of change just outlined, and (2) I loaned them one of my church growth books by Lyle Schaller, George Hunter, or Peter Wagner and said, "Most of what we have done at Yreka is described here."   The weakness of the first response is that it is limited to the experience of one church. The weakness of the second response is that it often surfaces a strong bias that exists among many of my colleagues: "That church growth stuff may work in the Midwest or the South, but it doesn't work here in Northern California."

My pastoral colleagues are not alone in thinking that the culture of Northern California is distinct from other areas of the country. The culture of Northern California, and particularly the San Francisco Bay area, is more pluralistic in its view of religions and lifestyles when compared to perhaps any other area of United Methodism.

As documented by a recent study, the churches of the California-Nevada Annual Conference are extremely diverse theologically. The same study also revealed that major differences which exist among the churches of the conference regarding their views of the nature and purpose of the Church and the conference have led to a "high level of distrust" (Panagraph Report 1-2). This distrust exists between the clergy and between the churches and the conference leadership; and it has hampered church growth efforts by the conference. Over the last six years, two conference-wide church growth campaigns have been largely unsuccessful with few churches participating. I along with many pastors feel that in this environment of distrust top-down approaches by the conference to promote church growth are unlikely to be successful.

It is not the purpose of this study to seriously measure the cultural differences of Northern California compared to other areas of the country. Rather, the purpose of this study is to identify methods and tools for local church renewal that have been used successfully in this conference.   Through identifying patterns among churches that have reversed long-term stagnation or decline (turnaround churches), I believe I can offer my colleagues something of value for those interested in church growth.   These findings carry the benefit of being more than the experience of just one church. The findings of this study may also speak to those who believe that California is unique and that things which work in other parts of the country do not work in California.   Finally, it is believed that a grass roots approach offers hope in light of the high level of distrust that exists within the annual conference.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to identify strategies and methods that contributed to renewal and growth within turnaround churches of the California-Nevada Annual Conference of the United Methodist. The project focused on the period from 1990 to 1996, and was limited to churches that as of 1990 had an average worship attendance between 50 and 200.

Research Question #1:   Prior to the turnaround, what factors were prohibiting growth in the church?

Research Question #2:   What changes took place that contributed to the turnaround of these churches?

Research Question #3:   Is growth currently accelerating or decelerating, and what factors seem most significant in explaining this?

Definition of Terms

Turnaround churches are those churches of the California-Nevada Annual Conference which, based upon average worship attendance, grew 3 percent or less for the period 1984 to1990 and then grew 50 percent or more for the period 1990 to 1996.

Average worship attendance is the "average attendance at the principle weekly worship service(s)" (Journal).

Population and Sample

The population for this study is all churches of the California-Nevada Annual Conference in existence from 1984   1996 that had:

a. an average worship attendance between 50 and 200 inclusive in 1990,

b. cumulative growth of less than 3 percent for the period 1984 to 1990 (the cumulative average growth rate for the churches of the conference for this period), and

c. cumulative growth of greater than 50 percent for the period 1990 to 1996. (The cumulative average growth rate for the churches of the conference for this period was 10 percent, therefore, 50 percent represents a rate of growth five times that of the typical church).

Limiting the range of churches to be study to those with average worship attendance between 50 and 200 inclusive as of 1990, was done in an effort to maintain greater similarity among the sample. The 50 to 200 inclusive range represents 58 percent of the 386 churches in the conference as of 1990; of the other 42 percent: 28 percent had average worship attendance less than 50, and 14 percent had average worship attendance greater than 200. While the

definition of small, midsize and large churches varies in different conferences, in this conference, midsize churches are often defined as those in the 50 to 200 range.

The sample for this study is identical to the population.

Methodology and Instrumentation

This study employed a qualitative-inductive rather than a quantitative-deductive methodology, in which the role of the researcher was significant in data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the findings. The primary means of acquiring data were semi-structured interviews. Face-to-face interviews were conducted whenever possible.   At each of the sample churches the researcher attempted to interview all clergy appointed during the 1990 to1996 period, a lay leader who served during the period of most significant turnaround, a long-time member who observed the entire 1984 to1996 period, and two persons who joined the church during the period of most significant turnaround. These persons were chosen with the assistance of the clergy from each of the sample churches.

Variables

The dependent variable of this study is growth as measured by an increase in average worship attendance among the sample population. Growth in average worship attendance is used to determine the population studied because it is the most comprehensive single indicator of a church's growth.   In studying the churches that comprise the population, other measurable indicators of growth were sought and analyzed including membership growth, Sunday school growth, number of baptisms, number of leaders, budget growth, and financial strength (Appendix E).

The independent variables are methods, tools, and other discernible factors that emerged through the interviews as contributing to growth.

The intervening variables of this study are the unique, non-transferable factors which positively and negatively affect growth, such as demographic changes, natural disasters (e.g. a church fire), and personal tragedies (e.g. pastor suicide).

Delimitations and Generalizabilty of this Study

This is a study of turnaround churches in the California-Nevada Annual Conference. Clearly, the population being studied is not representative of the entire California-Nevada Annual Conference. The population (turnaround churches) represents a minority whose rapid growth is atypical compared to the experience of the majority of churches within the conference. In addition, the limited scope of the population warrants caution in using this study to make generalizations.

With these delimitations in mind, however, it is reasonable to believe that the common elements identified through this study as growth producing are worthy of consideration for other churches desiring turnaround. This is particularly the case for the patterns which emerge that are consistent with the larger body of church growth research. I hope that the findings of this study will be further tested by pastors and laity in other churches of the California-Nevada Annual Conference and even beyond.

Overview of Dissertation

Chapter 2 grounds this study in the ever-growing body of literature being produced by those researching church growth and church renewal. Chapter 3 lays out the design of the study and describes how data was collected and

evaluated. Chapter 4 presents the significant findings that come out of the interviews conducted in the sample churches. Chapter 5 summarizes the major findings and offers an interpretation of both the data and the significance of the study.

CHAPTER 2

Precedents in the Literature

Church Growth Resources and their Use by Pastors in the

California-Nevada Annual Conference

Courses in church growth were not offered in the early 1980s at the Pacific

School of Religion in Berkeley where I completed my Master of Divinity degree.

Throughout seminary I cannot remember hearing about church growth. I felt as if

I was the only one with anxiety about this area of leading a church. From my

vantage point as a seminarian, the California-Nevada Annual Conference, with its

nearly 400 churches and extensive bureaucracy, seemed like one huge organism.

Even though this great organism had not grown for a number of years, I assumed

it still possessed within its vast structure of conference staff, boards, and agencies

all the tools and knowledge I would need to lead churches to grow. I believed this

knowledge would somehow find its way to me.

My seminary perspective was seriously flawed. The conference is not a unified

organism but made of up of fairly autonomous churches, most of which are

plateaued or declining.   Conference boards and agencies are mostly staffed with

clergy and laity with little experience or knowledge in the area of church growth. A

philosophy of institutional maintenance is firmly entrenched at most levels of

conference leadership.

Changes are now occurring. Church growth courses are currently offered at

the Pacific School of Religion. Churches and denominational leaders now seek

pastors with both training and a strong desire to lead churches to grow. Many of

my generation are seeking to discover the basics they did not receive when they

went through seminary. Our shelves generally include at least a small church growth section with books by Lyle Schaller, Peter Wagner, George Barna, and George Hunter.

This study is intended to build on this growing interest in church growth. Since there has not been much work in the area of church growth in the conference, I hope this study may prompt others with similar interests.

This study is intended to be of value to pastors like me who received little or no training in church growth through their Master of Divinity course work; therefore the review assumes minimal background knowledge.

<u>History of the Church Growth Movement</u>

Evangelism has long been a topic of great interest in the Church. Numerous books on evangelism have been published; however, most focused on methods employed by well-known evangelists or pastors. Beginning in the 1930s, Donald McGavran began to employ the methodology and controls of the behavioral sciences, especially cultural anthropology, to understand the dynamics of growing churches. His first two books, <u>Bridges of God</u>, published in 1955, and <u>How Churches Grow</u>, published in 1959, incorporated this new approach. "As a result, many helpful insights on how to turn around church plateauing and decline, how to avoid growth slowdowns, how to multiply new congregations, and how to diagnose and remedy the various problems of growth were discovered, taught, and published" (McGavran and Wagner 7-8). McGavran started the Institute of Church Growth at Northwest Christian College in Eugene, Oregon, in 1961. "In 1965 he moved the institute to Fuller Seminary and became the founding dean of the Fuller School of World Mission and Institute of Church Growth" (xi).

Peter Wagner describes McGavran's <u>Understanding Church Growth,</u> published

in 1970, as "the classic textbook by the father of the Church Growth Movement,

this is the essential starting point for any serious student of the field" (301).

Through the 1960s and early 1970s, this new approach to church growth was

spread through the work of "C. Peter Wagner, Ralph D. Winter, Win Arn and

George G. Hunter III" (xiv).

This new approach to evangelism and growth drew initial criticism.

> Church Growth writers sound like a hard driving North American
> businessman, armed with a sheaf of statistics, eager for new take-overs
> and determined to keep his concern within a category outlined by "growth
> companies." J.B.A. Kessler, Jr., July 1968 in "<u>The International Review of
> Missions</u>." (Berkley 110)

> We . . . urge readers not to be carried away by the enthusiasm of
> pragmatics at the expense of real dependence on God. To become too
> absorbed in methods based on psychological and sociological insights is to
> invite superficial or even counterfeit spiritual results. Robert T. Coote, June
> 1975 in <u>Eternity</u>. (Berkley 110)

Many pastors and church leaders still display negative attitudes toward this

approach to church growth. In the California-Nevada Annual Conference many

viewed church growth as selling short the prophetic social justice responsibility of

the Church. However, eight years ago an influential liberal district superintendent

gave what has since become a watershed "State of the Conference Address," in

which he confronted this widespread negative view of church growth. He

identified the conference as embracing the "bizarre" phenomenon which Richard

John Neuhaus describes as a confusing of "institutional decline with walking the

way of the cross" (Neuhaus 3). Since this address a new openness has emerged

toward church growth research and findings.

What is Church Growth?

Church growth, according to Peter Wagner is "all that is involved in bringing men and women who do not have a personal relationship to Jesus Christ into fellowship with Him and into responsible church membership" (McGavran and Wagner 114). Contrary to popular opinion, it is as concerned with theology as with numbers. Church growth brings together cultural anthropology, first employed on the mission field, and evangelism research. It employs scientific-empirical methodologies used in the social sciences to address this purpose. Church growth is primarily concerned with transferable principles that enable churches to grow.

Data Collection

Church growth, much more than traditional evangelistic literature, focuses on measurable parameters. Church growth research begins with hard data from local churches such as average worship attendance, membership, baptisms, and Sunday school attendance. By beginning with statistical data rather than personal theories or anecdotes, church growth research has been able to identify transferable principles and methods.

Church growth research is selective of which data are collected and compared. Wagner writes, "Instead of presenting a profusion of data, most of it irrelevant . . . church growth concentrates on those [measurable aspects and activities] that are most directly responsible for propagating the Christian religion" (Wagner and McGavran 78).

One of the challenges of data collection is that different denominations count people differently. Baptists define members as "baptized believers in good

standing." Episcopalians define members as "all baptized infants and adults" (58). Church growth research has had to adjust for such denominational differences if cross-denominational comparisons are made.

Finally, in an effort to weed out non-enduring short-term effects, church growth research focuses on the long term. Wagner writes, "Experience has shown that if you concentrate on the past ten years and analyze the situation well, intelligent decisions can then be made as you project future growth" (81).

Causes of Growth

Church growth research is concerned with understanding what causes or inhibits growth. Analyzing accurate, standardized, statistical data allows for the discovery of patterns. For example, a study of statistical data of the churches in the California-Nevada Annual Conference might reveal a correlation between major capital campaigns (e.g. a new building or parking lot) and an increase in average worship attendance. However, correlation is not the same as cause. It might be that many of the churches that embarked on major capital campaigns did so because of strong visionary leadership and that this type of leadership was the major cause of growth.

Church growth research involves probing and interviewing to understand the underlying causes of growth. According to George Hunter, the best church growth research includes the time consuming task of surveying and interviewing laity and clergy (Church Growth Lectures). Analyzing this type of data often exposes ineffective strategies of outreach, which have long been trusted by clergy and laity but produce few positive results.

A plateaued church seeking to turn around might come up with the strategy of putting energy into a campaign to draw inactive members back into the church. Many laity and clergy would identify this as a common-sense approach. However, Hunter writes:

> Church Growth research into what churches are really doing in evangelistic ministry tells us that many churches are too preoccupied with their own inactive nominal members. Perhaps 90 percent of what takes place in a typical church's 'evangelism' program is directed toward its own inactive members. (Spread the Power 164)

Hunter offers five root causes or explanations for the failure of such campaigns to draw back inactive members: (1) inactives are often perceived by active members as insincere when they joined, and this bias against them remains; (2) inactives leave because of unresolved conflicts which represent major barriers to reentry; (3) inactives form such a strong bias against their church that they are more likely to go to a new church than return to their old church; (4) inactives generally need to be able to "talk it out" before they will feel comfortable returning, which is something that does not easily happen; and (5) inactives often leave because there are subtle sub-cultural barriers causing them to feel like they just don't quite fit in the church (64-65).

These five root causes defy the common sense myth that inactives can easily be brought back into the church.   Only with intensive probing and interviewing is one able to discover the deeper causes of why inactives rarely return. While this information is difficult and time consuming to collect, it is of great value to a church developing a plan for growth. The same information revealing the barriers of entry for inactives can also be used to design programs and strategies for assimilating and retaining members.

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One benefit of this scientific approach is that well-documented survey and interviewing data become part of a larger pool of research available for others to use. In addition, the rigorous controls developed in social scientific research lead to a consistency of findings in the published work of the top church growth researchers.

The Dominant Principles of Church Growth

While the volume of church growth literature has grown tremendously since McGavran's <u>Understanding Church Growth</u> was published in 1970, a number of reoccurring themes have emerged. Church growth literature by Wagner, Schaller, Hunter, Barna, and Hadaway and Roozen tend to reinforce these basic themes.

George Hunter defines six foundational principles or "mega-strategies" that have emerged out of church growth research (<u>Spread the Power</u> 34-36).

<u>1. "Churches grow as they learn how to identify and reach 'receptive people'."</u>

Hunter identifies this principle as one of John Wesley's greatest insights. There are times or seasons during which folks are more receptive or "ripe" than other seasons. Sooner or later all of us learn that timing is important. For Wesley, this principle of receptivity was connected to his view of God's prevenient grace, which works to open people to the gospel. Receptivity often increases for needy people, dissatisfied people, and persons in transition due to a recent move, the birth of a child, a new job, or the death of a spouse (77-86).

<u>2. "Churches grow as they reach out across the social networks of their credible believers, especially their newest Christians.</u>"

Networks of friends and relatives are the primary means by which people choose a church. This principle can be readily verified by asking the members of

a congregation to answer the following question: "Are you here this morning because a family member, friend, colleague, or neighbor reached out at some time and invited you to come?" One of the problems many plateaued or declining churches run up against is that long-time members make few contacts with unchurched people because their circle of friends is within the church. New Christians can help bring people into a church because they tend to have more contacts with unchurched people.

3. "Churches grow as they 'multiply units' of various kinds (classes, choirs, groups, congregations, et al.) as recruiting groups and ports of entry for new persons."

Established groups often appear closed to new persons; therefore an ongoing process of creating new groups increases the likelihood of new members joining a small group. Schaller writes: "Do not expect long-established groups to attract new members! A far more attractive alternative is to invite future members to help pioneer new groups, classes, programs, events, choirs, circles and cells" (Plateau 94). Church growth research has discovered that as a church grows it encounters barriers at different key sizes. The 200 barrier (average worship attendance) is well documented. Wagner suggests that the most effective means of growing through the 200 barrier is through providing multiple fellowship groups (Wagner 130). The power of this principle of developing numerous small groups is the underlying power behind the model of the cell group church, popularized by Ralph Neighbour, Jr., Dale Galloway, and Carl George. The world's largest church, the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea pastored by Dr. Paul Yonggi Cho, is a cell-group church. This model has taken hold in Korea. "The world's two largest

Presbyterian churches, along with the largest Methodist church, are cell group congregations in Seoul" (Neighbour 24).

4. "Churches grow as they minister to the felt needs of undiscipled people, usually by developing new ministries."

Churches that discover this principle may create numerous specialized programs targeting the needs of persons with disabilities, recently divorced persons, parents of teens, seniors, etc. William Easum encourages churches that are interested in reaching new people to "find a need and fill it" (Easum 25). This involves not only a willingness to start new programs, but a means of assessing the needs of a community. Once again, new persons to the church are a key resource in identifying these needs. This principle is apparent from the newsletters of growing churches that almost always publicize a vast array of programs.

5. "Churches grow as they develop culturally indigenous ministries for the people they intend to reach."

"People like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers" (McGavran and Wagner 163). The creation of indigenous ministries involves churches intentionally dealing with the complex issues of ethnicity, class, and the multitude of subcultures that make up our diverse society. This principle stands in stark contrast to the popular idea of the church being a melting pot. However, to a person who is not a part of the dominant culture the melting pot often means giving up one's own cultural traditions and accepting those of the dominant culture. This may have been acceptable in the 1950s but for most people today it is not. Michael Novak describes this as "the rise of the unmeltable

ethnics" (qtd. in McGavran and Wagner 163). Even though efforts have been
made to break down barriers, the old saying remains largely true: "Sunday
morning at eleven o'clock remains the most segregated hour in America." The
positive side of this reality is that many denominations encourage the planting of
ethnic congregations, often in the same facility as Anglo congregations. Through
the 1970s and 1980s, the planting of ethnic congregations was the one growing
area of the California-Nevada Annual Conference.

Small groups, or cell groups, have been another means of developing
culturally-indigenous ministries in an effort to reach new groups of people.
Saddleback Community Church in Southern California, a 15,000 member church,
uses "community groups that meet in homes and focus on fellowship, sharing and
ministry to each other" to meet the needs of different subcultures. These groups
define their own agenda and choose their own curriculum, which allows for the
group itself to adjust to the specific need of a particular group (Hunter, Church for
the Unchurched 112).

6. "Churches grow from planning for the future, deciding what future achievement
they intend, laying the stepping stones to get there, and implementing the plans."

Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Community Church, asks, "What drives a
church?" The range of answers include "tradition, the personality of the pastor,
finances, programs, buildings, events and seekers" (Warren 77-80). He then
offers the "biblical paradigm" of a "purpose-driven church."

> 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. . . . Forget everything else until
> you have established it in the minds of your members. Recapture a clear
> vision of what God wants to do in and through your church family.

Absolutely nothing will revitalize a discouraged church faster than
rediscovering its purpose. (81)

While the target population and the way a church describes its purpose may
vary greatly, for growth to be "church growth," the purpose must be congruent with
the overarching purpose of bringing people into fellowship with Jesus Christ and
into responsible church membership.

Warren offers four guides in developing a purpose statement: (1) "It is
biblical." (2) "It is specific." (3) "It is transferable (able to be shared and
remembered by everyone in the church). (4) "It is measurable." Based on these
four guides he derives five biblically-based tasks which "Christ ordained for his
church to accomplish" and which are carried out by the New Testament church as
described in Acts 2.

1. Love the Lord with all your heart (worship).
2. Love your neighbor as yourself (ministry).
3. Go and make disciples (evangelism).
4. Baptize them (fellowship/belonging).
5. Teaching them to obey (discipleship) (103).

The processes employed for defining a church's purpose and from that
purpose developing goals and objectives vary a great deal. The critical issue for
churches is that they engage in this process of planning and goalsetting.

Causes for Plateau and Decline

Research on church-growth also reveals many of the causes for plateau or
decline. Knowing these warning signals is of great value. "The best response to
the tendency for congregations to plateau in size begins with recognizing the early
warning signals" (Schaller, Plateau 41).

Many of the causes for decline are rooted in the common life-cycle of an organization. George Barna describes four stages in the organizational life of a church. The first is the creation stage in which people come together to start a new church. The persons drawn in this first stage often have a strong entrepreneurial spirit. As the church begins to grow, a second stage, which Barna labels the development stage, sets in. In this stage "the church typically loses some of the entrepreneurial innocence and starts to become more set in its ways." The church begins "to institute a relatively predictable series of programs and policies and confronts the perplexities of facilities and infrastructure" (Barna 21). After some years of maturation, a third stage sets in as the patterns, practices, policies, and often leadership of a church become firmly established. According to Barna, numerical growth often ends as a church enters this third stage. The seeds of decline are planted: the zealous groups who started the church lose their passion or leave; an outward-oriented missional focus is replaced by a culture of maintenance; staff grows and lay involvement shrinks; and more resources are devoted to overhead and less to ministry. In the fourth stage the seeds of decline planted in the third stage take root and grow. At this point, plateau is often replaced by decline: few lives are transformed, few new people become interested in the church, most of those who are there were there during an earlier more glorious period. The fourth stage is death, although death does not necessarily mean a church closes. "Thousands of churches across America have deteriorated to the point where they are a ministry in theory only, a shell of what they once had been" (22-23).

Since this study focuses on understanding turnaround, these four stages show the magnitude involved for a church reversing long-term decline. Consistent with this, research "strongly suggests that the membership of congregations older than thirty years is not likely to increase significantly" (Compton and Sallee 3). Without some awareness of the processes which naturally occur within most churches over time and the difficulty of reversing them, most laity and clergy will often underestimate the costs involved in turnaround. The following characteristics of decline appear in much of the literature. Often a number of these characteristics are present in a declining church.

1. Inadequate Leadership

The principles of church growth cannot be implemented without strong leadership. The terminology of James MacGreggor Burns' "transformational leadership" versus "transactional leadership" is increasingly used by Schaller and others as an umbrella description of the leadership needs for growing churches today (Plateau 27). Transformational leaders want to inspire followers to a higher level of participation and satisfaction. They serve as moral agents who facilitate change by encouraging and elevating others to greater levels of responsibility. They seek to elevate followers into leaders and enable all to function as true Christian disciples. Transactional leaders want clear lines of authority and power. They function in terms of an exchange or transaction. At best they think in terms of fulfilling the contract and being successful. At worst they focus only on measurable outcomes, seek to promote dependency, and try to reduce the influence of others (Crandall Lecture).

A positive correlation exists between growing churches and transformational leadership, and declining churches and transactional leadership. Schaller advises churches interested in turnaround to look for pastor who is a transformational leader (<u>Plateau</u> 27).

2. An Inward Focus

"Declining churches generally focus inward rather than outward" (Barna 36). Maintenance replaces mission as the driving force of the church. This leads to churches being cut off from the needs of the surrounding community, making the church appear insulated and unattractive to outsiders.

3. Resistance to Change

Change is hard. Most churches will eagerly apply Band-Aid solutions but stubbornly resist changes that disturb the patterns of the church to which they have become attached to.   Schaller writes, "the reason most congregations remain on a plateau in size or shrink in number is because their system for attracting new people is not working. It needs to be changed. Are we willing to make those changes? Usually the answer is no" (<u>Plateau</u> 56). In addition, the four-stage life cycle of a church suggests that by stage four persons with the qualities needed to institute significant change generally are no longer in the church.

4. Poor Management

Management and administrative skills are not the same as leadership skills. Herb Miller writes, "Administration is what happens after leadership has been exerted" (qtd. in Compton and Sallee 28). While the load of management often falls on the pastor, particularly in a small church, laity often work under models

and assumptions of church administration that worked in the 1950s but do not work today.

5. Old Blood

Declining churches often have few young people. "It is difficult to build a thriving, vibrant church in which young adults and children are not a significant part of the mix" (Barna 36). One of the most significant changes of new life at Yreka was an influx of young families. In a church, children and young parents are one of the most powerful signs of hope for the future.

6. Demographic Changes

Changes in the surrounding neighborhood have long been a concern for many inner-city churches. More recently, churches built in the suburban boom since the second world war have watched their neighborhoods change and their membership base move away. Schaller offers a number of warning signals which if not heeded generally lead to decline: (a) a decreased emphasis on evangelism; (b) decreasing average worship attendance and average Sunday school attendance; (c) a pastor thinking and talking more about retirement; (d) a decrease in the number of major givers to the church; (e) references to the past overshadowing references to the future; (f) fewer baptisms; (g) nearly everyone disappearing within ten minutes of the benediction; (h) an inability to design and implement a long-term strategic plan; and (i) a drop in total dollars given to mission (Plateau 42-46).

Research on Turnaround Churches

In addition to general church growth literature, a small but growing body of literature exists that specifically focuses on turnaround churches. Kirk Hadaway

conducted a survey with data through the late 1980s of turnaround Southern Baptist congregations (he uses the term "breakout churches"), comparing them with churches that remain on a plateau. His conclusions were that "improvements in worship, Sunday School, prayer, and so forth, all help, but the keys to renewed growth apparently are evangelism and goal setting" (Hadaway 183). His data also revealed a disproportional number of "biological" additions among plateaued churches compared to the "breakout churches" (182).

Books specifically focusing on turnaround churches include: George Barna's Turn-Around Churches published in 1993, and Ron Crandall's Turn Around Strategies for the Small Church, published in 1995.

Barna studied thirty turnaround churches of varying sizes. His team "conducted lengthy open-ended interviews of one to two hours" with each pastor. The book is a concise summary of his findings. He identifies the following "elements of revival" among the dying churches that were "restored to wholeness" and divides them into two categories: "Congregational factors" and "Pastor Leadership factors" (Barna 42-56). Congregational factors:

1. Widespread and heartfelt prayer for turnaround.

2. Strong "bonds of trust within the congregation (relational integrity)."

3. The "traditions," "assumptions" and "experiences" of the past do not limit the future.

4. Intentional outreach.

5. Seeking an outside perspective.

6. A committed core group of laity.

<u>Pastor Leadership Factors</u>

1. Quality sermons by the pastor.

2. The selection of a new pastor: "a new pastor must be brought in to lead."

3. The selection of a strong leader: not a "caretaker," "healer," "manager," or "consensus builder."

4. A pastor who loves the people.

5. A hardworking pastor.

6. A pastor who is able to equip the laity for effective, targeted ministry.

7. A supportive staff.

Crandall's study is based on a sample of 100 turnaround churches. He used a survey questionnaire for all 100 churches and then interviewed fifteen of the pastors. The book is built around the narrative stories of these turnaround churches, many of them told through the words of the turnaround pastors themselves describing the factors that led their churches to turn around.

> I try to enable people and let them have a part in ministry. I try to help them see what they can do that will help the church and the community. I try to make every job important, even sharpening pencils for the attendance registration pads. And I'm not coming up with all the ideas. They're coming from the congregation. That makes this a really fun place to be because there's always something to celebrate or enjoy. What I'm enjoying is finding the talents of people. It brings out stewardship of talents God has graced them with. They have made their own wooden table for the altar, created the stained glass insets for the doors, started two new children's choirs, put up a Christmas tree and invited the whole neighborhood to help decorate it, began to share space and some worship with a Chinese congregation, and are talking of ways they can meet some of the needs of the students at the new elementary school being built next door. (qtd. in Crandall 123)

> The few remaining active members were mostly white "Anglos" in a changing neighborhood that was now 80 percent Hispanic. Some efforts had been made previously to reach the newer residents, but to little avail. There were significant differences in addition to the obvious language and cultural barriers. . . . Linda [the pastor] offered a class in English. Thirty-five

men and women were in attendance. A second round of classes attracted sixty. A third effort produced one hundred. A full-blown ministry was developing. . . . Five years later, Trinity United Methodist Church and its pastor, Linda Poteete-Marshall, received from the denomination an evangelism award for churches with fewer than one hundred members. In that year alone there had been a 54 percent increase in membership amounting to twenty-three new members, all part of the new immigrant community. (130,146)

My study of turnaround churches parallels Crandall's qualitative multiple case study approach.   A wealth of well-written, up-to-date books have come from Schaller, Wagner, Hunter, and Barna on the general principles of church growth. However, what is in short supply are resources that empower and give hope to clergy and laity who are praying for turnaround in their churches. Stories of actual churches turning around bring the general principles of church growth to life. The first of the two preceding stories powerfully communicates Hunter's principle of multiplying points of entry; the second, Hunter's principle of creating indigenous ministries.

More resources are needed that illustrate church growth principles being successfully employed. Church growth research is still a relatively recent phenomenon, and different segments of the Church remain skeptical of its scientific approach. The case study approach of this project is to humanize and to increase the accessibility of the powerful principles revealed by church growth research.

Pluralism and Its Affect On Church Growth

Cultural pluralism refers to a society that is plural in the variety of cultures, religions and lifestyles which it embraces (McGrath 369). Peter Berger, the well known American sociologist, describes this environment in terms of the typical person on the street being "confronted with a wide variety of religious and other

reality-defining agencies competing for his allegiance" (127). The decreased

influence of the Christian Church in the United States, together with the growth of

other religions—in terms of both numbers and visibility—has led to an awareness

by most people that we live in a far more pluralistic culture today than fifty years

ago.

Cultural Pluralism and Ideological Pluralism

Lesslie Newbigin has written extensively on pluralism, first as a missionary in

India and later while living in England and the United States. He sees cultural

pluralism, as described above, often leading people toward ideological pluralism

where tolerance or acceptance of cultural diversity evolves into a celebration of

this diversity, and any claims of absolute truth are rejected as imperialist and

divisive. When this is the case, he writes, "the rival truth-claims of different

religions are not felt to call for argument or resolution; they are simply part of a

mosaic—perhaps one should say kaleidoscope—of different values that make up

the whole pattern" (Newbigin 86).

It is not easy to determine the exact linkage between cultural pluralism and

ideological pluralism, but they seem to have increased in tandem. Hadaway and

Roozen, in the first chapter of Rerouting the Protestant Mainstream, affirm this

pattern:

> With so many groups claiming to hold the truth, and fighting with others that
> hold different versions of the truth, many Americans naturally conclude that
> no one has the truth, or assume that what is true for you is not necessarily
> true for me. This has become the "liberal," relativistic alternative to the
> dogma of evangelical denominations. . . it poses a difficult challenge for
> denominations that want to reclaim inactive church members and
> evangelize the "unchurched." (21)

Mainline churches, which tend to be closer to the culture than conservative-evangelical churches, seem to be most affected by the growth of pluralism in the culture. Luidens, Hoge, and Johnson in their study of the beliefs of 500 Presbyterian Baby Boomers found that the majority reject Christianity's claims of absolute truth (253).

Changes in the Way Evangelism is Viewed Through the 1950s and 1960s

Prior to 1960, Yreka UMC had never experienced a long-term period of decline. Yet many long-time members identified something changing in the 1960s. I found this same perspective among long-time members in other churches in this conference. This view is consistent with larger membership trends in mainline denominations which suffered dramatic decreases in membership beginning in the 1960s (Hadaway and Roozen 29). The statistics at Yreka do not show a mass exodus. The decrease seems mostly the result of fewer new people coming into the church. In the late 1970s, Hoge and Roozen identified this same pattern nationwide among mainline churches. They write that this decline in mainline denominations in the late 1960s and early 1970s was "more a result of fewer people joining than of members leaving" (Hoge and Roozen 15).

Why did fewer people join mainline churches beginning in the 1960s? In their research on the underlying belief systems of laity, Donald Luidens, Dean Hoge, and Benton Johnson identify what they refer to as a pervasive "lay liberalism" rooted in a pluralistic world view for "non-fundamentalist" churched persons.

> The defining quality of lay liberalism is its wide-open tolerance of diversity in matters of belief and practice. . . . Lay liberals are reluctant to make claims of ultimate authority for Christianity. Few would agree that salvation is only

through Jesus Christ or that Christ is the only source of absolute truth. Rather, they maintain that other faith traditions are equal claimants to truth insights and that it would be inappropriate for Christians to challenge those alternative visions. In effect, they argue that their own Christianity is an accident of birth; had they been born to Muslim or Buddhist families, they would have been Muslims or Buddhists. (Luidens, Hoge, and Johnson 253)

Such ideological pluralism reduces the motivation for reaching out to unchurched persons. Hoge and Johnson see pluralistic churchgoers condoning evangelism and mission outreach that "involves education or service to the less fortunate," but not condoning it to "marshal crusaders for conversion among the unbelieving or for revival among the unchurched" (253).

Newbigin sees increased cultural pluralism as having a corrosive effect on evangelism. "In a pluralist society, such as ours [Europe and the United States] , any confident statement of ultimate belief, any claim to announce the truth about God and his purpose for the world, is liable to be dismissed as ignorant, arrogant, dogmatic" (Newbigin 10). "The gospel cannot be accommodated as one element in a society which has pluralism as its reigning ideology" (222).

The widespread acceptance of pluralism, both in the larger culture and among many laity and clergy, has taken place rapidly over the last forty years. Craig Van Gelder's research on pluralism reveals a strong correlation between when a person was born and the degree to which pluralism is normative. He identifies those born in the years 1945-55 having a mixed or "competing" world view; those born in the years 1956-65 having a "fragmented" pluralistic world view; and those born after 1966 having a "more complete" pluralistic world-view (Van Gelder 413).

One of the most dramatic signs of the effects of pluralism is reflected in the radical change that took place within the National Council of Churches with respect to evangelism. Following World War II the National Council of Churches,

dominated by the mainline denominations, was active in national evangelistic

crusades. In his study of the National Council of Churches, Thomas Berg notes

radical changes taking place in the NCC during the ten-year period 1956-1965.

> The United Evangelistic Advance [of the National Council of Churches],
> involving thirty-eight denominations, began in October of 1949 and
> continued through 1950, which Bader [president of the NCC] boasted would
> be "the greatest year for evangelism our ministers and churches have ever
> known." The Council estimated that its visitation evangelism efforts alone
> produced forty thousand "decisions". No sooner did this campaign end
> than Bader proposed a new one for 1951-1952, billed as "The Churches
> United to Evangelize America."
> The high-water mark of the NCC's evangelism activity came in 1954
> and 1955. . . . The NCC General Assembly gave preliminary approval to a
> resolution calling on the churches to reserve the fall of 1955 and all of 1956
> for a concentrated, consecrated and integrated interdenominational
> Protestant Crusade in America . . . by which no less that 5 million people
> would be sought to be added to the ranks of the Christian Church. . . . It
> was to be the evangelistic equivalent of total war.
> Through much of the 1950's, the NCC had defined evangelism with a
> marked emphasis on "conversion." To evangelize is to present Christ
> Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, that men shall come to put their trust
> in God through him, to accept him as their Savior and serve him as their
> King in the fellowship of his Church. Yet, by the early 1960's the NCC had
> nearly divorced itself from "conversion-centered evangelism". The focus of
> evangelism shifted away from building up the Church and toward
> ministering to the world in its secular needs. Associated with the turn to the
> "secular" was also a strong reemergence of the basic theological divisions
> between fundamentalists and modernists, especially a new embrace of
> religious pluralism by mainline leaders that undercut the rationale for
> "conversionist" evangelism. (Berg 60-61)

The change in attitude toward evangelism that Berg describes seems to have

significantly affected the United Methodist church. Today few clergy and laity

have first-hand experience in evangelism. Those that do usually picked it up in

one of three places: in a mainline church prior to the late 1950s when evangelism

was emphasized; in a conservative-evangelical church; or in a para-church

organization such as Campus Crusade for Christ.

All of this has profound implications for a church turnaround. Most declining churches probably do not possess much skill or experience in evangelism. A turnaround pastor will need to bring these skills to the church, yet the skills required need to be different from those employed before 1960. The evangelism required needs to be able to reach a world that has largely embraced the same world view (pluralism) that shut down evangelism in mainline churches forty years ago, not an easy task.

George Hunter describes this change as the Church losing the advantage of the home field and having to play on "opposition turf."

> Indeed the very "map" of Christianity has changed. Once the countries and peoples of Europe and North America were "Christian," and the countries and peoples of the Third World were "mission fields." The picture today is starkly different. Today a higher percentage of Angolans than Americans are active, professing Christians. . . . The United States has become the largest mission field in the Western Hemisphere. For the Church in America to carry on its evangelistic mission, we must know what we are up against and how the rules of the game are changing. (Can the West Be Won? 43)

Hunter sees some parallels between the Church's task of evangelism today and what the early church had to deal with in different parts of the first century Greco-Roman world. This included evangelizing peoples who are initially hostile or skeptical toward Christianity with its claims of absolute truth, have no knowledge of the gospel, and who find the claims of Christianity implausible. Hunter believes that we are entering a "new apostolic age" in which the most effective churches for reaching secular people will be those that, like the early Church, learn to play and win in an environment of great cultural and ideological pluralism (Can the West Be Won? 43-4).

Church Growth in a Pluralistic Culure: Insights from Paul in Athens

Hunter's view that we are entering a new apostolic age is based on the perspective that as Christian beliefs and values become less dominant in our contemporary culture, the Church finds greater connection with the first century Greco-Roman world. He sees this new apostolic age as a call for the Church to once again respond boldly to people immersed in a pluralistic culture. Donald Soper echos the same sentiments: "Most evangelism today presupposes that the Middle Ages are still with us and takes little or no account of the fact that the Church today is back in apostolic times" (Soper 16).

To respond to this new apostolic age the Church must develop models of evangelism that address three main challenges.

1. Reaching people often hostile or skeptical toward Christianity.

2. Reaching people within a culture with a variety of other religions or philosophies.

3. Reaching a population with no knowledge of the gospel (Hunter, Church for the Unchurched 35).

Paul's speech at the Areopagus in Athens has long been lifted up as an example of evangelism to people described by the three challenges Hunter associates with the apostolic age. While it is difficult if not impossible to assess the degree of ideological pluralism that existed among the hearers at the Areopagus, what is clear is that there was a great degree of cultural pluralism— perhaps as great as in any place throughout the Greco-Roman world. Conrad Gempf describes first century Athens:

> By the apostolic era it [Athens] was no longer a world superpower nor the hub of intellectual activity it once was, but it did have a legacy from the glories of the past in its civic pride and its reputation for matters of philosophy and piety. Full of idols, as Acts 17 records, Athens was described by ancient authors as a model of "speaking well of the gods"; so religious were the people of Athens, that in the city altars were even set up "to unknown gods." (Gempf 51)

Nearly a third of the book of Acts consists of speeches, twenty-four in all. They form one of the key vehicles for communication in the book. Yet only two of the twenty-four speeches are addressed to Gentiles: Paul's speech at the Areopagus, and the very short speech Paul and Barnabus made at Lystra (Acts 14:15-17). John Polhill notes that Paul's speech in Athens holds special significance as an example of his preaching to Gentiles:

> Paul worked among Gentiles for eighteen months in Corinth and nearly three years in Ephesus, but no example of his preaching there is given. The reason quite simply is that it has already been given--in Athens, in the very center of Gentile culture and intellect. (Polhill 365)

1. A Hostile or Skeptical Crowd

The people Paul addressed at the Areopagus were not especially friendly. Some scholars feel the passage suggests that Paul was in a trial-like setting, noting that Paul's speech comes following a time of debating "Epicurean and Stoic philosophers" after which it says, "they took him and brought him to the Areopagus and asked him 'May we know what this new teaching is that your are presenting?'"(Acts 17:18) F. F. Bruce suggests that the group Paul addressed represented a body vested with jurisdiction in religious and moral matters. If this was the case, they would have had the responsibility of granting Paul freedom to, or censuring him from disseminating his new ideas to the people of Athens (Bruce 378).

While the question of a trial is ambiguous, what is clear is that a significant segment of the crowd was very skeptical if not actually hostile toward Paul, referring to him as "babbler." The word used is "spermologos" which mean "seed-speaker," which evoked an image of a bird pecking seed at random. This was a derogatory term used for "someone who picked up scraps of ideas here and there and passed them off as profundity with no depth of understanding whatever" (Polhill 367). Finally, Paul is accused of being a "proclaimer of foreign divinities" which parallels what Socrates was accused and ultimately convicted of four centuries earlier (Johnson 314).

2. Several entrenched religions or philosophies represented among the hearers.

As noted earlier, both Epicurean and Stoic philosophers stood within the crowd. Epicureans were materialists who did not believe in life after death, while the Stoics as Pantheists affirmed the continuation of the soul in some form after death. Both of these groups saw Athens as their spiritual hub (Johnson 313). In addition to these two established religious/philosophical groups, a third entrenched group might be labeled free thinkers—for Athens remained a center for philosophical dialogue and the exploration of new ideas. Bruce writes, "It [Athens] was at this time a leading center of learning; in modern idiom we might describe it as a great university city" (376).

3. No Knowledge of the Gospel

Judaism had made inroads in Athens, which is evident by Paul arguing "in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons" (Acts 17:17). The "devout persons" referred to here, often called "God-fearers," generally "accepted the theological and ethical teachings of Judaism, attended the synagogue, and

observed many of the Jewish ceremonies, but could not admit the validity or necessity of the strange and painful surgical rite [circumcision]" (Pope 928). Yet, there does not seem to be any indication in the passage of Jewish influence upon the intellectual community, in light of Paul being labeled a "babbler" and some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers in the marketplace thinking that Paul was lifting up another pagan god. There is clear precedent of Judaism being integrated with Greek philosophy during the first century A.D. through the writing of Philo Judeus in Alexandria (Goodenough 796). Yet while such integration of Jewish and Greek thought may very well have existed in Athens, it does not seem to have been voiced by those who responded to Paul's speech at the Areopagus, and it seems even less likely there was any knowledge of the gospel message.

The Substance of Paul's Speech at the Areopagus

The substance of Paul's message is fivefold:

1. There is a single creator God (Acts 17:23-24).

2. This creator God cannot be adequately worshipped through idols (17: 24-25, 29-30).

3. The creator God is actively involved in the creation and we can seek him and come to understand him to some extent through the creation, and he is always near to us his children (17:26-29).

4. All people everywhere are now responsible for repenting by turning from idols (17:30).

5. The creator God has sent his appointed one to judge based on righteousness and this appointed one he raised from the dead (17:31).

Gempf sees strong connection between Paul's message at the Areopagus and a section of his first letter to the Gentile Christians in Thessalonica (I Thessalonians 1:9-10) where he describes the process through which they came to faith in Christ (Gempf 53).

A notable parallel appears in 1Thessalonians 1:9-10 where Paul writes of the Thessalonians' response to his message. Their first step was toward monotheism: they "turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God" (1:9), reminiscent of the mainly monotheistic rather than specifically Christian thrust in his speech at Athens. Even more remarkable is the parallel between Acts 17:31 and 1 Thessalonians 1:10. Both speak about a future divine judgment which is linked to Jesus as judge. In both cases the resurrection of Jesus by God is brought into view. The differences in content between the two passages are slight and consistent with the fact that one is directed toward pagans and the other toward those who have become Christians (Gempf 53).

This close parallel with Paul's description of the Thessalonians' process of conversion from paganism to Christianity leads one to wonder if Paul's message at the Areopagus is based upon a strategy of evangelism which grew out of seeing how pagan peoples responded to the gospel. One of the criticisms of the content of Paul's message is that it lacks a full proclamation of the gospel. Bruce notes that M. Dibelius saw this as a possible deficiency in the message, stating that verse thirty-one was the only Christian sentence in the entire Areopagus speech; to which Bruce agreed and then said, "Up to this point Paul has been speaking of God the creator, who makes provision for his creatures, in terms which he might have used before his conversion. Only when he has

communicated the knowledge of the living God could he go on intelligibly to talk of 'his Son from heaven' whether at Athens or (as earlier) at Thessalonia" (Bruce 386).

The message of Paul and Barnabus at Lystra (Acts 14:15-17) also parallels Paul's message at the Areopagus. In Lystra after Paul healed a man crippled from birth, the people thought Paul and Barnabus were the pagan gods Hermes and Zeus. Then Paul, as he did later at the Areopagus, calls the people to turn from worshipping human representations of the divine to the one living creator God, who is active in the world. Three of the five main parts of the Areopagus message are found in Paul's word at Lystra.

The parallels that exist in these three passages, all of which are related to communicating the gospel to Gentiles suggest that Paul had developed a pattern of proclamation in his outreach to Gentiles. One of the questions addressed through this study is whether a particular pattern of proclamation finds success in reaching secular people, and if such a pattern exists, to see if it parallels Paul's in Acts 17 and I Thessalonians 1:9-10.

The Methodology of Paul's Proclamation at Athens

The methodology Paul employs in Athens, like the substance of the message, also seems to be guided by a carefully developed strategy of evangelism. Central to this strategy is the use of culturally indigenous linguistic and cultural bridges allowing Paul to communicate to hearers having no familiarity with the gospel. This methodology can be seen in Paul's opening words:

> Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, "To an unknown god." What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. (Acts 17:23-24)

One can practically see Paul smiling with great joy as he stood before that inscribed altar, the same smile any preacher shows when discovering a gem of a sermon illustration. The inscription represented something that belonged to the hearers themselves (coming from one of their own altars) which Paul was able to use to connect with them. It functioned as a cultural bridge that if used well, would cause the hearers to ask, "I wonder who that 'unknown god' might be?"

As powerful as this bridge might be, Paul draws on several other types of cultural bridges in his presentation. A second would be the two poetic phrases that he uses. The first of these, "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28) was probably a "traditional Greek triadic formula emphasizing the pantheistic view of the divinity residing in human nature" (Polhill 375), which Paul re-appropriates to communicate a creator God intimately involved with his creation. The second of these, "For we too are his offspring," (17:28) came from some of the Athenians "own poets" and is used by Paul to talk about an intimate relationship with the one creator God. Both of these are cultural bridges which Paul very strategically used to communicate his message.

Finally, Paul incorporates into the form and style of his message a strong appeal to natural theology, which again was a possible bridge between the gospel and the intellectual culture of the hearers. I.H. Marshall describes Paul's use of natural theology at Athens, which he compares with the first chapter of his letter to the Roman church:

> So far as natural theology . . . a contrast has been drawn between what Paul says in Athens in Acts 17 and to the Romans in Romans 1:18-19. In the former he uses his audience's religious beliefs as a point of contact in evangelism, while in the latter he reflects that though people have a knowledge of God from his acts in creation they have not followed it

through but have turned to idolatry. F.F. Bruce has rightly commented that if you take the person who wrote Romans 1 and put him down in Athens he will probably say the kind of things that Luke reports. (96)

Polhill sees the entire speech at the Areopagus as Paul attempting to build bridges with the intellectuals in Athens.

> He used their language, quoted their poets, and sought to reach them on terms they understood. As such his speech at Athens became a model for the Christian apologists who later attempted to present the faith to the pagan intellectuals of a later day. It should be noted that Paul never compromised the basic Christian principles of God as Creator and Judge and the resurrection of Christ. . . . Paul's Areopagus address provides both a precedent and a pattern for this essential task. (379)

One other insight that can be derived from Paul's proclamation at the Areopagus involves the outcome. Paul's proclamation of the gospel resulted in a small subset of the people being interested in hearing more, and ultimately a few people coming to believe. The proclamation at Athens could have been judged a failure compared to the response to his preaching in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch where the majority of the people are interested in hearing more, and many come to believe. Yet there is no indication that Paul judges this outcome as a failure. He does follow-up ministry with a few people from the crowd which leads to some becoming believers, and then he goes on to Corinth.

This may represent the sort of outcomes that can be expected when reaching out to people with little or no Christian background today. A huge response, like the outcome of Paul's preaching in Pisidian Antioch, is unlikely for churches that are reaching out to skeptical secular people.

Just as the substance of Paul's message raises some questions to be addressed in this study so does the style. Does Paul's use of form and style to develop cultural bridges provide a model for communicating the gospel to

unchurched people? And finally, does the relatively small response at the

Areopagus represent the sort of response that should be expected when reaching

out to secular people today?

Cultural Tensions within the Jerusalem Church: (Acts 6)

One of the biggest challenges of Yreka's turnaround was dealing with different

cultures clashing within the church. As new, and particularly younger, people

began coming into the church in significant numbers, tensions slowly began to

rise. The new people coming into the church came with different cultural

backgrounds than the core group that had sustained the church for many years.

Worship, particularly music, became a potential battlefield. The church had a

long history of a choir that sang mostly traditional anthems, and eighteenth and

nineteenth century congregational hymns were a staple nearly every Sunday.

Would traditional music continue to set the tone for worship, or would

contemporary music make inroads?

Yet, it was not just about the type of music, the type of instruments played was

also an issue. The guitars and the organ did not fit well together, so we developed

an opening music time led by piano and guitar. Soon four or five guitarists were

strumming chords every Sunday. For one cultural group it was wonderful and

exciting, yet for another it was uncomfortable and threatening.

In the midst of this at times I lay awake at night wondering if the changes were

worth all the tension. The growth in people was undeniable, but it came with a

cost in terms of increased tension that seemed to be spreading through the

congregation. Some Sundays the tension of these cultures clashing overwhelmed

all the evangelistic satisfaction which the new people coming brought forth. I

began to wonder if the tension would lead to an exodus of people and eventually we would be back to the size we were before we started to grow.

Tension Among Hebrew and Hellenist Jews (Acts 6:1-7)

The book of Acts only gives hints about the cultural make-up of Jerusalem, yet extra-biblical sources clarify that it was a culturally pluralistic population with the majority of the residents being Palestinian natives, but a sizeable minority being Jews from the Diaspora. Fiensy suggests that "based upon a study of the language of epitaphs inscribed on tombs, 10 - 20 percent of the total population were Greek speaking—most of which would have grown up in the Diaspora" (231).

Acts 6:1-7 deals with tensions between the Hebrews and the Hellenists. The traditional view of scholars, beginning with John Chrysostom in the fourth century, is that these two groups of Jewish Christians were differentiated by language, with the Hebrews speaking primarily Aramaic, and the Hellenists speaking primarily Greek (Krodel 132). Polhill suggests that the Hellenists were Greek-speaking Jews of the Diaspora who were living in Jerusalem (177). Consistent with this view, Bruce believes that some of the separateness between the two groups may have been due to the Hellenists worshipping in synagogues where Scriptures were read and prayers recited in Greek (181).

Carey C. Hill descibed an alternate to the traditional view emerging in the mid-nineteenth century when F.C. Baur advanced the theory that this tension went deeper than language, and was rooted in deep theological division. Based on this view, the tension in Acts 6:1-7 was between "conservative Hebrews" who wanted to "adhere as nearly as possible to Judaism" and "liberal Hellenists" who sought "to separate Christianity from its Jewish roots." If this was the case, then Acts 6

may represent a precursor to the spread of Christianity to Antioch, which became the center of the more liberal Hellenist faction (Hill 462).

While it is unclear whether the background tension in the church was rooted primarily in language differences, as is traditionally thought, or in deeper theological differences, there clearly were two main groups in the Jerusalem church. The specific tension lifted up involved the Hellenists within the church complaining "against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food" (Acts 6:1).

Caring for the poor was a distinctive dimension of the Jerusalem church as described in Acts. Two separate passages (Acts 2:45 and 4:34-35) tell of members of the church selling their possessions, including land in the case of Barnabas, and Ananias and Sapphira, and the proceeds being distributed to all "as any had need." Since the Hellenist widows were not native to Jerusalem, their vulnerability may have been amplified (Augsburg 132). Polhill notes the ambiguity of the introduction to the passage with respect to time, "Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number" could mean that a number of years had passed since Pentecost. This opens the door to the possibility that this tension had been building for some time (178).

Resolution of the Tension

The apostles, referred to here as "the twelve" (Acts 6:2) most likely to distinguish them from "the seven" to be chosen, call together the community of the disciples in order to share their plan for resolving the tension. Based on the rather large number of members of the Jerusalem church at this time (Acts 4:4), those who came may have been some sort of a representative group (Johnson 106).

The apostles share with the whole community that they see their role as one of spiritual leadership, stating that they do not want to "neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables" (6:2). Bruce notes that the phrase translated "to wait on tables" probably represents administrative service rather than domestic service (182). The apostles, wanting to avoid taking on additional responsibilities which might result in their neglecting the word, asked the community to select from among themselves "seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task" (3).

The apostles' proposal parallels Jethro's advice, to Moses in Exodus 18:17-26 to select God-fearing men to share his administrative burden, leaving him free to deal with the hard cases (Bruce 182). There are two significant elements to the proposal. First, the proposal creates new leadership charged with a new area of responsibility. Second, while the proposal comes from the apostles, it pulls the entire community into the decision making process. The first element of the apostles' proposal parallels Exodus 18. The the second does not parallel, since Moses does the selecting in Exodus 18 rather than the community.

The proposal "pleased the whole community." What takes place is that the seven chosen all appear to be Hellenist Jews based upon their Greek names, (Polhill 181) and one of them, Nicolaus, is "a Jewish proselyte of Antioch" (5). Therefore, while the apostles did not require that the seven chosen be from the Hellenist group that issued the complaint, the community seemed to have felt that this was the most effective way to resolve the problem. The seven are then presented to the apostles who "prayed and laid their hands on them" (6). The passage concludes with a description of how the church faired following this

resolution of the tension: "The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith" (7).

There appear to be two outcomes. First, the internal tension is resolved and with it new leadership is created. The new leadership is charged with responding to certain needs which were not being met, or at least were perceived as not being met. Second, the church grew dramatically. This new growth included a great many priests becoming obedient to the faith. Polhill notes that there were perhaps as many as 8,000 priests in Palestine, most of them poor and cut off from the small group of elite priests who held the reigns of power; these were mostly likely the priests who were coming into the church (183).

Crandall suggests that the creation of unity within a faith community is the sort of "miracle" that convinces outsiders looking in that God is present (Turnaround 119). This has certainly been true at Yreka, where working through divisive issues with the entire church body invited and encouraged to participate in the decision, has coincided with increased rates of growth. Also, through each decision new areas of leadership were created and people volunteered or were nominated to fill them. This pattern took place through the decisions to add a new worship service and to move away from a traditional to a blended style of worship. Both decisions held great potential for tension. Yet, out of the decision making process came not only the decision itself, but tremendous energy and excitement (often from the new leadership) that contributed to the growth of the church.

The traditional view of the tension between the Hebrews and the Hellenists (primarily rooted in language differences) suggests a definitive resolution to the

tension. The alternate view, that the tension was rooted in deep theological differences, points to the resolution in Acts 6 being temporary with the tension reappearing in the events that precipitated the need for the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-29). In light of this, certain deeper tensions within a church, particularly those representing great theological differences, might require more than one church council to arrive at a faithful resolution.

<p align="center">Institutional Distrust and Its Affect on Church Growth</p>

In 1996, the California-Nevada Annual Conference embarked on "Panagraph," an extensive "conference listening process." Thousands of clergy and laity responded from 82 percent of the churches in the conference. Panagraph revealed deep feelings of distrust.

> The Listening Process participants said loud and clear: (1) There is a pervasive misperception that Annual Conference leadership is out of touch with and doesn't care about local church concerns. (2) The assumption that the local church shall be responsible for Annual Conference funding is based on values and priorities no longer shared by many in our local churches. (3) The Annual Conference is perceived as irrelevant to most local church members. (Panagraph Report 2)

The deep feelings of distrust that the Panagraph Report revealed help explain why two major conference-wide church growth programs have met with limited success. The first involved the conference hiring church growth consultant Herb Miller and his associates to make presentations in each district of the conference. These presentations were designed to encourage local churches to participate in individual church growth programs subsidized by the conference. The two small churches I served at the time each participated with good results, yet the overall participation rate in the conference was less than 10 percent. The second conference-wide program of church growth was a major fundraising campaign for

new church development.   The result was that only 25 percent of the $10 million

goal was reached.   Clearly, issues of distrust contributed to the failure of these

two conference-wide programs. In addition, the failure of these two programs has

added to the growing perception of distrust between local churches and

conference leadership. The Panagraph report was helpful in seeing the extent of

the distrust that existed within the conference, however, it did not provide a clear

plan for alleviating the distrust.

In addition to hampering denominational church growth efforts, institutional

distrust affects church growth in others ways. Schaller, Barna, and others stress

that laity shop for churches based more on how well a church can meet their

needs and based less on denominational affiliation. The days when a typical

United Methodist layperson would move to a community and naturally seek out a

nearby United Methodist church has past.

As denominational benefits decrease, local churches increasingly see the

denomination more as a liability than an asset.   In his book, <u>Tattered Trust</u>, which

chronicles the growing level of distrust within the mainline denominations, Schaller

notes a number of specific assumptions within the United Methodist Church that

are barriers to growth. These include: (1) the assumption that the cabinet is more

competent than congregational leaders to choose the best qualified available

pastor for a particular congregation; (2) ministers cannot be trusted where they

will serve most effectively; (3) the laity cannot be trusted to choose the final

destination for their benevolence dollars; (4) congregational leaders no longer can

be trusted on when and where to plant new missions (<u>Tattered Trust</u> 52-53).

Distrust in nearly all institutions has increased in our society. Centralized decision making structures increasingly have been replaced by decentralized structures to accomodate this systemic change in our culture. While a few rapidly growing denominations seem to defy this trend (eg. Latter Day Saints) most have moved with it, including the United Methodist Church The California-Nevada Annual Conference is less centralized today than a generation ago. Today the local churches of this conference enjoy greater say in the selection of new pastors and how mission giving is allocated.

Distrust is difficult to measure and there is little beyond speculation regarding its effects on church growth. Nonetheless, indications of institutional distrust, specifically in terms of the relationship between the church and conference leadership, was one of the areas explored through interviews with clergy and laity in the turnaround churches of this study.

Research Design and the Qualitative-Inductive Methodology

Two approaches exist for addressing research questions: quantitative and qualitative.

> The quantitative approach is typically used to answer questions about the relationships among measured variables with the purpose of explaining, predicting, and controlling phenomena. The qualitative approach is typically used to answer questions about the nature of phenomena and the purpose of describing and understanding the phenomena from the participant's point of view. (Leedy 104)

The exploratory nature of this study is compatible with a qualitative-inductive approach. The researcher plays an integral role through all levels of the study: design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation.   In qualitative analysis the

researchers "enter the setting with open minds, prepared to immerse themselves in the complexity of the situation" (106).

Data Analysis in Qualitative Research

The analysis of data in a qualitative study takes place throughout the study. Creswell writes, "Data analysis will be conducted as an activity simultaneously with the data collection, data interpretation, and narrative reporting writing" (153). One of the critical roles the researcher plays is in determining how data are utilized. In multiple case studies the researcher collects far more data, often in narrative form, than can be presented. Therefore one of the critical roles of the researcher is to discern what data can be condensed and summarized and what data are best presented in their original narrative form. In the literature on turnaround churches, Barna chose primarily to condense and summarize interview data, while Crandall chose to present considerable data in narrative form. Both forms are used to present the findings of this study.

Creswell suggests that a "coding procedure be used to reduce the information to themes or categories" when processing interview data. He offers eight steps for coding:

1. Get a sense of the whole by reading the entire transcript carefully.
2. Pick one interview and go through that interview asking relevant questions: What is this about? What are the underlying themes?
3. Out of number two, make a list of all topics, cluster similar topics.
4. Abbreviate the topics as codes.
5. Find the most descriptive wording for your topics and turn them into categories.
6. Make the final decision on the abbreviations and alphabetize the codes.
7. Use the codes to analyze the data.
8. If codes changed considerably in steps 4, 5, and 6, recode the original data. (155)

Verification

A study should be designed with verification in mind. With qualitative research

come a number of different means of verification.   (a) Triangulation involves

"using multiple data collection methods, sources and analyses and theories to

check the validity of the finds" (Leedy 169). (b) Member checking involves "having

your participants review your research report for accuracy and completeness."

(c) "Establishing a strong chain of evidence can strengthen the validity of a study"

by showing a clear orderly procedure among research questions, operational

questions, interviewing, and coding (169).

One of the most important aspects of verification involves great care in

establishing the delimitations and generalizability of the study. The researcher

must ensure that the findings of the study are supported by the research actually

carried out. Generalizability primarily relates to size of the sample of the study;

therefore, it is limited in qualitative studies employing a case-study approach.

Summary

Through Chapter 2 I reviewed a variety of church growth literature. This

allows the methods and ideas employed in turnaround churches to connect with

the larger stream of church growth research. Church growth literature that

specifically addressed turnaround churches, and particularly the book by Crandall,

offer a multiple case study approach that closely parallels this study. The three

other sections--the history of church growth research, the effects of pluralism on

evangelism along with Biblical models of evangelism in response to pluralism,

and qualitative research design--provide additional context for this study.

Chapter 3 focuses on the specific design of the study: the boundaries of the sample and how the turnaround churches were selected, a description of the semi-structured interview format, the questions that guided these interviews, and how the information was analyzed. Chapters 4 and 5 present the findings and compare them with the findings from the larger sphere of church growth research reviewed in this chapter.

CHAPTER 3

Design of the Study

The Problem and the Purpose

In the California-Nevada Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church the majority of churches are plateaued or in decline. Many clergy received little or no training in church growth. Most laity have limited experience in evangelism. A great need exists for education and training in evangelism and other areas of church growth.

The purpose of this study is to identify church growth ideas, methods, and programs successfully used by turnaround churches. The findings of the study will be made available to the clergy and laity of the conference.

The review of literature in the last chapter revealed that:

1. Church growth is a vibrant and expanding area of research, and there is considerable consistency in the findings of the leading researchers.

2. Church growth research is still a relatively new phenomenon in the church, and some clergy and laity remain resistant to it findings.

3. Pluralism is a growing challenge for those interested in church growth, and it may affect a church's commitment to evangelism.

4. Institutional distrust is an intensifying concern for the mainline churches; its presence seems to be leading denominations toward greater decentralization.

There are three ways the background literature benefits this study. First, the literature provides guidance for the overall design of the study. Second, the literature assists in the interview and data collecting process. Third, the literature provides structure for the analysis of the data collected.

Population and Sample

As stated in Chapter 1, the population for this study is all churches of the California-Nevada Annual Conference in existence from 1984   1996 that had:

1. An average worship attendance between 50 and 200 inclusive for the year 1990.

2. Cumulative growth of 3 percent or less for the period 1984 to 1990.

3. Cumulative growth of 50 percent or more for the period 1990 to 1996.

This population of turnaround churches will be determined in the following manner. Each year the conference produces a journal that lists average worship attendance, membership, and a wide range of other data on each of the 381 churches in the conference.

Step 1: Enter average worship attendance for each church in the conference on a spreadsheet for the years: 1984,1990, and 1996.

Step 2: Exclude churches with 1990 average worship attendance of 49 or less, or 201 or more from the study. These limits narrowed the size range of the churches being studied. Yreka UMC, pastored by the researcher, was also excluded since it was used for pretesting and for comparison.

Step 3: Determine the percentage change in average worship attendance from 1984 (base) to 1990, excluding churches which grew 3 percent or more for this period.

Step 4: Determine the percentage change in average worship attendance from 1990 (base) to 1996, excluding churches which grew less than 50 per cent for this period. The remaining churches will constitute the population of the study.

Sample

The entire population of turnaround churches was studied. The population and the sample were identical.

Yearly data for the 1984 to 1996 period was collected and recorded on a computer spreadsheet program for the following categories: average worship attendance, membership, average Sunday school attendance, number of baptisms, total number of people joining the church, number of persons joining by profession of faith, and total expenses paid.

A separate sheet displaying this data in chart form was prepared for each of the sample churches. These sheets were used to illustrate the growth of each turnaround church during the interviews with clergy and laity.

Robert Kuyper, who recently retired as conference statistician, described some of the statistical aberrations which distort the data. For example, a church that previously did not count children in worship attendance might change and begin to count them. Unfortunately there is no way to control such statistical aberrations in determining the sample of the study. However, inquiry about such aberrations took place though the interview process and was noted.

Research and Operational Questions:

Research Question #1:   Prior to the turnaround, what factors were prohibiting growth in the church?

Operational Questions 1, 2 and 3

1a. (to laity) How long have you been a part of this church and what drew you to the church initially?

1b. (to clergy) When were you appointed to the church, and how did you feel about the appointment at the time?

2. (to laity and clergy) As you look at the average worship attendance and membership data of your church are there elements of the data that surprise you?

3. (to laity and clergy)   What factors contributed to the long period of plateau or decline that the church experienced?

Purpose of the Operational Questions 1, 2, and 3

June Audrey True suggests that an interview begin with non-threatening "warm-up questions," which "put the respondent at ease" and allow for the respondent to more comfortably address more challenging questions through the course of the interview (True 212). Question one was a warm-up question intended to set the respondent at ease and to acquire relevant background information. Question two was asked to determine the level of awareness the respondent had of the growth history of the church. Question three was asked to allow the respondent to identify factors which may have contributed to plateau or decline. Follow-up questions were asked to elicit further information, although, I tried to avoid asking leading questions.

Research Question #2:   What changes took place that contributed to the turn-around of these churches?

Operational Questions 4 - 9: (identical questions to both laity and clergy)

4. How would you describe the growth of this church since the turnaround began? (rapid, gradual, in clumps, etc.)

5. How would you describe new people who are coming to the church.

6. What major factors do you see contributing to the growth of this church? Was a specific church growth program employed?

7. How would you describe the leadership role of the pastor.

8. How would you describe the leadership role of the lay leaders.

9. Did a theological transition precede or accompany this growth? If so, how would you characterize this transition?

Purpose of the Operational Questions 4 - 9

The intent of these operational questions was to surface the methods, principles, and programs (independent variables) which the sample turnaround churches successfully used to grow, while controlling for bias from uncontrollable factors (intervening variables). Since a minimum of four people from each sample church were interviewed, patterns found in the interviews assisted in prioritizing the factors which most likely contributed to turnaround and growth.

Research Question #3:   Is growth currently accelerating or decelerating, and what factors seem most significant in explaining this?

Operational Questions 10 - 12: (identical questions to both laity and clergy)

10. Is growth slowing? If so, what factors do you see contributing to this?

11. If you could name the three most important factors leading this church to stop declining/stagnating and to start growing, what would they be?

12. If you could name the three most important factors for this church to sustain this growth, what would they be?

Purpose of the operational questions 10 - 12

The intent of these operational questions was to explore the longer term implications of a church turning around. In Chapter 5 this data is compared to the larger body of research on growing churches.

Pretesting

Operational questions were pretested on laity and previous pastors of Yreka UMC. The pretesting provided an opportunity for testing and gaining experience in collecting data. In addition, pretesting helped to determine the following:

1. The amount of time needed for each interview.

2. The effectiveness of the semi-structured interview questions and format.

3. If interviewing more persons from each sample church is needed.

Through the pretesting, the operational questions were adjusted to more effectively address the research questions of the study.

Data Collection

As stated earlier, statistical data on average worship attendance, membership, average Sunday school attendance, baptisms, number of persons joining by confession of faith, and grand total expenses paid came from the conference journal. Average worship attendance and membership was available in computer spreadsheet format from the Conference Statistician. This greatly facilitated in determining which churches constituted the population of the study.

Once the population of five turnaround churches was determined, interviewing became the prime source of data collection. The Administrative Council survey (Appendix C) was used as a secondary source of comparison with the interview data.

Confidentiality and anonymity were honored in presenting the findings. The turnaround churches are identified by letters A, B, C, D, and E, and persons were not identified by name. This was communicated at the beginning of each interview, and it seemed to allow for candid responses. With the permission of the person interviewed, each interview was audio-tape recorded. The use of these tapes was limited to the immediate data collection needs of this study.

Description of the interview process.

The four steps described in Population and Sample section to determine the population of turnaround churches resulted in six churches. Of these six, Yreka UMC was separated from the other five since it was to be used for pretesting and comparison. The remaining five churches constituted the turnaround churches of the study (Appendix A). These five churches were very different: one was in an inner city, one was in the suburbs of a large city, two were in midsized semi-rural cities (population 10,000 – 25,000), and one was in a small rural town. The five churches came from four different districts of the conference. As will be further clarified, three were self-identified by both clergy and laity as theologically "conservative" or "evangelical" and two were self-identified as theologically "moderate" or "mixed."   In four of the five churches, the pastor who led the church through the turnaround (which from now on will be referred to as the turnaround pastor) was the current pastor. The current pastor of the other church followed the turnaround pastor three years ago.

Once the turnaround churches were determined, detailed charts on average worship attendance, membership, average Sunday school attendance, baptisms, number of persons joining by confession of faith, and grand total expenses paid

were prepared. (Appendix E). Letters were then sent to the current pastor of each turnaround church (Appendix B), with a copy of the Administrative Council Survey enclosed (Appendix C). This letter explained the purpose of the study and asked for their assistance. All five current pastors of the turnaround churches agreed to participate in the study.

Upon receiving agreement from the current pastors of the five turnaround churches to participate in the study, I mailed to each church a packet containing the Administrative Council Survey to be completed at the next scheduled Administrative Council meeting (Appendix C). The Administrative Council Survey was completed by all five churches. After receiving back the completed surveys by mail, I contacted each turnaround church and scheduled the date for my coming to the church and interviewing the four specified laity and the pastor.

The current pastor of each of the five turnaround churches helped select the following persons to be interviewed from each church: (1) all clergy appointed during the 1990-1996 period; (2) a lay leader who served during the period of most significant turnaround; (3) a long-time member who observed the entire 1984-1996 period; and (4) two persons who joined the church during the period of most significant turnaround.

The current pastor of each turnaround church also assisted in the selection of a day for the interviews to be conducted at the church. These persons were contacted by the current pastor and if they agreed to be interviewed, times were scheduled on the predetermined day.

In addition to the interviews, I sought to get a feel for the church and the surrounding community by walking around the church and the surrounding

neighborhood. This proved to be helpful in allowing me to see how the church fit into the community.

The interview questions (Appendix D) guided each of the twenty-five interviews conducted. The semi-structured approach of using open ended questions avoided leading on my part, and allowed the laity and clergy being interviewed to digress when they felt it was relevant to the question. This allowed me to hear a number of personal stories which added to my understanding of the dynamics which led first to decline or stagnation and finally to turnaround in each of the churches. The only negative to this approach was that at times people wandered into non-relevant areas, and a few of the interviews went substantially beyond the 20 – 25 minutes anticipated for each.

<div align="center">Data Analysis Methodology</div>

This study of turnaround churches employed a qualitative case study methodology. An inductive approach of observing patterns among the interview data was the primary means of analyzing data. The eight step coding procedure suggested by Creswell and outlined in Chapter 2 was used to analyze the interview transcripts. This analysis revealed patterns among the methods, ideas, and programs which the respondents in the study felt contributed to turnaround and growth. These patterns were then compared with the findings of current church growth research. These comparisons are noted in Chapter 5.

The reliability of the study was addressed through the three means of verification described in Chapter 2. Maintaining a minimum of five interviews from each church, ensured some triangulation. Statistical data from the turnaround churches were used to test the interview data. For example if a person identified

rapid growth in the Sunday school, this was compared to the Sunday school data that was charted for the church.   "Member checking" took place through the researcher having the current pastors review the compiled data from their particular church.   Finally, the procedures of the study as described through this chapter were carefully observed to ensure a strong chain of evidence.

Summary

In this chapter the researcher has described the specific design of the study: the boundaries of the population of turnaround churches; the dependent, independent and intervening variables of the study; the twelve operational questions and their relationship to the three research questions, the use of pretesting; the procedures for data collection; the interview process, and the methodology that will be used for analyzing the data. Chapters 4 and 5 present the findings and compare them with those from the larger sphere of church growth research reviewed in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4

Findings of the Study

<u>Summary of Responses to the Operational Questions</u>

The five clergy and twenty laity interviews were extremely informative. I found that laity provided a very different perspective than clergy. Laity tended to focus on the role of the pastor, even when the questions inquired about the church in general or lay leadership. Clergy tended to focus on key decisions and turning points. Clergy interviews in general were longer than laity interviews. For certain areas laity responses were best compared just with other laity responses, and clergy responses compared just with other clergy responses. Since the statistical data and the interviews provided a fairly detailed understanding of the church as a whole, I was able to make some comparisons between the five churches.

At the time of the interviews, three of the five turnaround churches were continuing to experience growth. One of the five had experienced a leveling off of growth. The final church was experiencing moderate decline. The current growth climate of the churches affected the responses of both laity and clergy; however, this bias was tempered by my focusing primarily on the period 1984 – 1996.

Research Question #1: Prior to the turnaround, what factors were prohibiting growth in the church?

The following areas are prioritized from most important to least important based on the number of responses of the ten long-time laity who had knowledge of the their respective church during its period of stagnation or decline.

1. Weak Leadership

Weak leadership was a universal response by laity who had been in the churches during the period of decline or stagnation that preceded turnaround. People described this in different ways: "the church's ministry was not very vital," "no vision," "lost vision and purpose," "two poor pastors in a row," "pastor focused on his own family problems," "not much was going on in the church," "no outreach," "pastor stayed too long [13 years]."

2. Clergy Sexual Misconduct

Five people identified sexual misconduct as a significant reason for decline or stagnation. One of the churches went through a serious scandal involving sexual misconduct by the pastor who preceded the pastor who led the church through the turnaround. The scandal was described as requiring a number of years of healing before the church could move on. In this church, even new members who were not present during the scandal were aware of its effects. One other church had gone through a horrific scandal involving clergy sexual misconduct; however since this happened many years earlier it only was lifted up by two of the five persons interviewed from that church.

3. The Absence of a Biblical Focus

Three laity and two clergy identified theology or the lack of a biblical focus as contributing to decline. For two of the five churches a renewed focus on the Bible led to even new members knowing that this was a distinct change from the past. Some responses focused on theology, such as "universalist theology provided no impetus for evangelism" or "the church had a liberal pastor who had no passion for lost souls;" others focused on not emphasizing the Bible enough. Responses

in this area: "no Bible study," and "there was no emphasis on the Bible and the

Bible was not seen as the word of God."

4. Weak Preaching

Besides pastoral leadership, three long-time laity identified weak preaching as

a contributing factor: Responses were: "monotone preaching," "church [worship]

was boring," and "there was a lack of biblical preaching."

5. Facility Problems

Three persons identified building concerns as contributing to decline. These

came from two of the five churches. For one inner city church, the problem was a

huge sanctuary which "became an albatross" because it required tremendous

financial resources to maintain and because it was far too large for the

congregation and therefore created a feeling of emptiness every Sunday morning.

For the other church where facility concerns were a problem, the issue was

maintenance of a small education building that had become a junky storage

facility after years of not having a Sunday school.

6. An Absence of Planning or Goal Setting

Since planning and goal setting was a common pattern during the turnaround

phase of each church, two (of the ten) long time laity interviewed were aware that

it was not present prior to the turnaround. One layperson responded: "the pastor

did not set goals for growth;" yet the other layperson identified this area of

weakness as being the responsibility of both the pastor and the congregation: "we

didn't plan any outreach."

7. An Absence of Young People and Children

Only two persons (laity) lifted up the absence of young people and children

when asked about the factors that prevented growth; however, in eighteen of the twenty-five interviews the presence of young persons and children were lifted up as being a significant factor contributing to growth.

Research Question #2: What changes took place that contributed to the turnaround of these churches?

The following areas are prioritized by number from most important to least important among the responses of those interviewed. I begin with the category "Pastoral Leadership" because it was by far the most significant reason identified in bringing about turnaround. The responses regarding "Pastoral Leadership" are divided into five sub-categories (a,b,c,d, and e), which are also prioritized based on the number of responses relating to each.

1. Pastoral Leadership

In all five churches, a new pastor was central in bringing turnaround. In two of the five churches, the pastor preceding the turnaround pastor was identified as a positive factor in laying the groundwork for turnaround. The responses relating to pastoral leadership fall into six categories: personality of the pastor, preaching , vision and planning, outreach and visitation, and modeling faithfulness.

▪ Character and personality. In nineteen of the twenty-five interviews, the Character and personality of the pastor was identified as a key factor for growth. While this is a broad category, it represents far and away the most common response regarding factors contributing to growth. Responses included: "positive," "optimistic," "great personality," "personable and open," "youthfulness," "good negotiator," "reaches out well to visitors," "older ladies love him," "not lackadaisical," and "involved with people."

- **Good preaching skills.** High quality relevant sermons were second only to the personality of the pastor as being especially significant for turnaround. Responses were: "sermons are biblically based," "clear presentation of the gospel," "powerful sermons without yelling," "sermons emphasize teaching the word," "sermons are relevant and contemporary," "the pastor truly means what he says," "he preaches about God's grace, I grew up with wrath," "preaches out of the pulpit," "good vibrant sermons," "messages from the Bible," "you need to come and listen to his messages—I can't wait till next week," "Biblical principles are preached," "positive sermons," "terrific sermons—made the Bible relevant."

- **Vision and planning skills.** This was an area emphasized more strongly by clergy than laity. Four of the five churches identified some planning and goal setting related to growth. Responses were: "the pastor is very good in developing a vision and setting goals," "the pastor was able to focus on ministry," "pastor was able to relate the past and the future," "the pastor used the book the <u>Purpose Driven Church</u> as a model," "Ken Callahan resources were used in developing a plan," "a vision was established—which involved the neighborhood and the city," "the pastor led the church to a consensus on the direction of our ministry," "a vision was developed focusing on children and families," "the pastor had strong vision," "the new pastor brought a new vision."

- **Compassionate Accessibility.** Visitation was identified as an area of strength by just one of the five turnaround pastors. Two of the five pastors identified it as an area of personal weakness. Yet, a common response among laity from three of the five churches revolved around the pastor being good about visitation (particularly when people are sick) and very accessible. Responses in this area

were: "lots of visitation to those in need," "accessible," "can handle the problems of others," "remembers who you are by name," "pastor personally connects with people," "pastor prayed with people individually," "pastor was a good counselor," "good at home visitation and hospital visitation," "pastor called new visitors (by phone)," "the pastor is accessible to people in emergencies."

- <u>Models faithfulness.</u> Responses in this area came up in five of the twenty lay interviews. The responses were: "pastor exuded love," "the pastor was a gift from God," "the pastor gives of himself," "works hard," "puts in 70 hours a week," "he is a conduit from God," and "I can see God's light through him."

2. New Worship Services

For three of the five churches, the addition of new worship services was identified as being significant to the growth of the church. In addition, one other church was preparing to add a new service at the time the interviews were conducted.

For one of the churches the new service was identified by all who were interviewed (both clergy and laypersons) as the key event along with the appointment of the turnaround pastor which brought about dramatic growth. At this church the new service was very contemporary in style while the other service was very traditional. The contemporary service grew until the capacity of the sanctuary was reached. This prompted the church to move the contemporary service to the local high school. Unfortunately this move did not work well and the contemporary service was moved back into the sanctuary. Another church similarly added a contemporary service, but the more traditional service has

remained the larger of the two. This same church was in the process of adding a third service at the time of the interview.

The third church in which new worship services were described as being an important part of its turnaround has started two new services. In this church the three services were similar in style. The pastor described them as "traditional worship that is approachable, warm and friendly," and this description was confirmed in the lay interviews. The earliest of these three (8:00 a.m.) is an abbreviated service which averages approximately forty-five minutes. The pastor of this church, who was very aware of the trend toward contemporary services, said, "We are doing things that are not supposed to happen in a growing church, such as not using praise music."

3. Young People and Children

Having young people and children coming into the church was identified in thirteen of the twenty-five interviews as being significant to the church turning around. Responses included: "we started drawing young families because of our Sunday school," "young people returned to the church," "drew youth and their families," "attracted younger persons looking for security in a rapidly changing world," "families came who were looking for a grounding for their children," "children and youth share in worship," "lots of youth," "the church is attractive for young families like us."

4. Quality Ministry Staff

Four of the five turnaround churches had paid staff other than the pastor (none of the churches currently had associate pastors). Paid ministry or program staffs in three of the five churches were affirmed by both clergy and laity as significant to

the growth of the church. Responses in this area: "we have a strong staff," "small groups leaders have been strengthened by (name of staff person)," "bringing (name of staff person) on board was one of the things that caused the church to grow," "hiring (name of staff person) has been one of the keys," "the music program including different choirs and handbells for children are strong because of (name of staff person)," "good use of quality staff," "we hire good people and pay them well," "brought in quality staff: youth director, music director and outreach director," "we have a strong children's ministry because of (name of staff person)."

5. New Small Groups

Clergy and laity in all five churches identified the creation of new small groups as being instrumental in turnaround and growth. Responses included: "small groups helped us assimilate new members," "small groups allowed laypersons to lead instead of the pastor," "new groups are important." In one church Disciple Bible Study was the impetus for the creation of a number of small groups, in another church Promise Keepers was the impetus.

6. Specifically Identified Programs

A few specific programs came up in the interviews as being very significant.

Walk to Emmaus was extremely significant for one of the churches with three of the five people interviewed identifying it as part of the reason for growth. In that church close to a hundred persons had gone on the Walk to Emmaus or Chrysalis (the teenage version of Walk to Emmaus). It was identified as a catalyst for the empowerment of leaders, as well as a watershed spiritual experience for most who participated.

Promise Keepers was identified in two of the five churches as being a key reason for growth in the church. For one of the churches it was lifted up by a layperson as the single most significant element, other than the pastor, for turning the church around. In that church, a local Promise Keepers group meets weekly.

Disciple Bible Study was significant in one of the five although in addition to Disciple Bible Study other Bible studies such as Crown Ministries (theme of finances and stewardship) and Serendipity Bible Study had been used successfully. One church found much success in Kerygma Bible Study, feeling that it had "solid biblical scholarship," "was very approachable" and offered more flexibility than Disciple Bible Study since it could be offered through a thirty-week course or a seven-week course.

7. Lay Leadership

The importance of lay leadership received mixed responses. Two of the five pastors identified equipping laity for ministry as an area of weakness they saw in themselves. Only one of the five pastors identified this as an area of strength. Laity in general tended to be more positive about the importance of lay leadership, although their responses also were mixed.

In the one church in which lay leadership was seen as a major area of strength, the pastor emphasized the development of lay leaders through one-on-one discipling. Two of the laity interviewed from this church were persons who had experienced this individualized discipling by the pastor. Their responses affirmed this as a great strength of the pastor: "many strong leaders have developed," "the pastor is a good at shepherding."

In the other four churches, lay leadership was usually identified with specific areas of ministry. The clergy from these churches responded: "we had no secretary, so we created a volunteer group of secretaries and established a church office with office hours," "laity are leaders in the Walk to Emmaus." Laity from these churches also focused on laity taking on specific areas rather than general leadership in the church: "laity were empowered to volunteer," "lay leadership is mainly in the Sunday school and as small group leaders," and "laypersons are active in worship, in Sunday school, and in visitation." There were also some negative responses from laity: "lay leadership is too lackadaisical," "not enough lay leaders," "a small core group does most of the leadership," "too much lay energy used in maintaining committees."

8. Demographic Considerations

Two of the five churches were in communities that were experiencing rapid population growth, and for these two churches this was identified in the responses: "the church is in a good location in a growing community," and "the growth of the church was partly due to demographic growth in the community." For one church located in the an inner city neighborhood that was experiencing rapid change (though not net population growth), success came through the establishment of a Vietnamese congregation (resulting in approximately half of the overall growth in average worship attendance) and through need-based ministries (food, substance abuse, and single parent support) which drew people who lived in the surrounding neighborhood. For one church, there was a negative demographic change in the middle of the turnaround phase as the local military base was closed. This came as a shock to the church, since for most of its history

approximately 30 percent of its attendance and budget came from active military personnel. Yet while they suffered a short-term drop in worship attendance, the base closing was used as a catalyst for establishing a new vision that included a strong commitment to outreach. Within two years worship attendance exceeded pre-closure levels and this growth has continued with the church reaching new segments of the community—especially youth.

Table 1 shows the number of responses in each category based on the the twenty laity interviews and the five clergy interviews. The last column respresents the number of churches where there was at least one response in that category.

Table 1

Interview Responses by Category

Response Category	Total Y=25	Laity Y=20	Clergy Y=5	Churches Y=5
1. Pastoral Leadership Factors:				
a. Character/Personality	19	16	3	5
b. Good Preaching	16	14	2	5
c. Vision/Planning Skills	15	11	4	4
d. Compassionate Accessiblity	7	5	2	3
e. Models Faithfulness	6	5	1	3
2. New Worship Services	14	10	4	4
3. Young People and Children	13	9	4	5
4. Quality Ministry Staff	12	8	4	3
5. New Small Groups	11	7	4	5
6. Specific Programs	8	5	3	3
7. Lay Leadership	6	5	1	4
8. Demographic Considerations	4	3	1	2

Research Question #3:   Is growth currently accelerating or decelerating, and what factors seem most significant in explaining this?

This question proved difficult for most people to answer. The responses were generally short and focused not on acceleration or deceleration but on positive or negative factors which currently affected the church.   At the time of the interview, as stated earlier, three of the five turnaround churches were continuing to experience growth. One of the five had experienced a leveling-off of growth, and one church was experiencing moderate decline. For the three churches experiencing growth, the responses focused on factors seen as leading to future growth: "starting a new contemporary service [the first new service for this church] will help us grow," "the second service will lead to more growth," "can't see why the church shouldn't continue to grow," "a third worship service will provide a growth spurt." There were also some whose response was more theologically based: "if the Word of God is preached the church will grow" and "prayer will be key to future growth."

For the church in which growth had leveled off, the responses of both laity and clergy focused on tension between the two worship services, theological tension in the larger United Methodist Church, and space limitations. The tension between the two worship services had been building almost since the contemporary service was started in 1992 and two separate congregations developed. The rapid growth of the contemporary service (140 average attendance) and the gradual decline of the traditional service (currently 60 average attendance) has only exacerbated the tension. This tension was identified with responses such as: "the two services have never gotten along," and "the tension has created an atmosphere of

distrust." A second concern was described as a "crises of biblical authority in the larger United Methodist Church," with the issue of homosexuality being the central controversy. One layperson responded: "the church is currently on a plateau because of problems with the larger church which the congregation is very aware of." The other concern mentioned by two laypersons was that the contemporary service had outgrown the sanctuary and that this limited growth.

In the church that was declining, there was considerable pessimism. Two main reasons for the decline were offered. The first was that the conference made a mistake in moving the turnaround pastor to a church less than fifteen miles away: "the conference messed up," "people went with the pastor." The second was that the church was losing younger families to another church in the community that had a strong youth program: "we've been losing our young families to a new community church down the street."

<div align="center">Additional Areas Explored</div>

Methods of Evangelism

Evangelism came up in each set of church interviews, generally through the clergy interview. The methods of evangelism employed varied. Three of the pastors identified themselves as being "evangelical" and they described evangelism with the following responses: "We made evangelism a priority—focusing on life change through Jesus Christ," and "We focused on people coming to Christ." The laity in these churches were also more likely to talk about evangelism in terms of "people coming to Christ."

One of the pastors described both himself and the church as theologically mixed: "We don't fit either the liberal or conservative stereotype." He said that as

an inner city church committed to reaching inner city people, "We speak the faith language of the heart—and that is evangelical Christianity." Yet, on the other hand, he said that the church is extremely inclusive—warmly welcoming all types of people. This, he said, does not fit with the way most conservative-evangelical churches function.

The last pastor described both himself and the church as more moderate theologically, focusing on evangelism in terms of persons becoming active in the church, and through the church, growing in their faith. The pastor of one of these churches said that both he and the church "didn't fit a liberal or conservative stereotype" when it came to evangelism.

The three churches with evangelical pastors employed a wide range of different methods of evangelism. In one church the pastor described a program of "friendship evangelism" in which persons were encouraged to invite friends who did not have a church. At this same church, the first Sunday of each month an invitation to accept (or re-accept) Christ was incorporated into the communion invitation. This was described as being successful, with a number of people making first-time commitments to Christ, but also many long time members reaccepting Christ. The pastor estimated that about one third of the new people who came into the church had no church background.

In a second church, evangelism was described in three different ways: first, through the pastor working one-on-one for those who began coming to the church; second, through a strong outreach to youth through Sports Excellence (a Christian youth program that is affiliated with "Youth With A Mission"); third, through the

Walk to Emmaus program in which many persons new to the church often came to accept Christ.

In a third church, a lay person described evangelism in terms of "reaching (the name of the community) for Christ." At this church a core group of people was committed to inviting people to come to church. The pastor said that two families who were "on fire for the Lord" were responsible for bringing in twenty other families. He said that if God had not brought those two families to the church, growth would not have been nearly as dramatic. The pastor of this church incorporates an invitation to accept Christ into nearly every worship service.

In the church described by the pastor as mixed theologically, evangelism was a significant goal addressed through the extensive strategic planning process that this inner city church utilized. Outreach programs, such as a summer education academy for neighborhood children, new worship services, and a new generation-X service, were key parts of this church's evangelistic efforts.

In the last church, self-defined as moderate theologically, evangelism took the form of developing ways to reach out to new people and drawn them into the church. Excellent worship was seen as the most effective means of drawing in new people. Every aspect of worship from how people are greeted and welcomed to visitor follow-up is carefully planned. Making the faith attractive for every group of people: young families, seniors, widows and seekers, is seen as the way this church will continue to grow and nurture people in their faith.

While there were a variety of models of evangelism employed, one common element was that each pastor worked hard to make the church "user friendly." This goal affected every program and ministry of the church, but especially

worship. Along these lines, all five pastors employed a conversational style of preaching and leading worship, which was seen as helping to avoid the stereotypical image of churches being cold and sterile.

Methods of Dealing with Conflict

Dealing with conflict came up in some form or another in every set of church interviews. Clergy were more likely than laity to address it. As a general rule, turnaround resulted in change and change produced conflict. The most common areas of conflict were music in worship, adding new worship services, new people into leadership, and conflict stemming from actions of the larger United Methodist Church.

Music was an area of tension in two churches. Both of these churches responded by adding new worship services. For these churches, the new services grew; however, in one of them, as described in the previous section, the tension shifted from the issue of music itself, to friction between the two worship services. This same church also experienced considerable tension around the issue of homosexuality and how the conference and the United Methodist Church responds to this issue. All of the laity interviewed were very aware of this tension. Both of these areas of tension have proved very difficult to resolve.

Finally, three of the five pastors addressed the tendency for tensions to arise between long-term established leadership and newer leadership. In each of these three churches, rather than traditional roles on boards and committees new leadership often served in new areas of ministry such as leading small groups, working in youth ministry, and helping to lead worship, especially in the area of

music. Using new leadership in new ministries was described as helpful in reducing or avoiding tension with older leadership in the church.

Analysis of Three Recurring Themes

Many themes become clear simply from breaking down the responses into categories and prioritizing these categories based on the number of responses in each. Yet in addition to the number of responses in each category the nature of the semi-structured interview process allowed for people to address some of the reasons why certain elements were important.

The Role of the Pastor

It would be difficult to overstate the vital role that the pastor played in the turnaround of each church. In each interview, before I asked about the leadership role of the pastor in the turnaround process, I asked the general question: "What are the major factors you see contributing to the growth of this church?" Without exception, laity identified the pastor as, if not the most important factor, one of the two or three key factors leading to turnaround. With two laity that I interviewed there was obviously some tension with the pastor, but despite this they still identified the central role of the pastor played in the turnaround of the church.

The order is significant among the identified elements of pastoral leadership: (1) characger and personality, (2) preaching skills, (3) vision and planning skills, (4) visitation and accessibility, and (5) modeling faithfulness. If I had just interviewed pastors, vision and planning skills would have been the highest priority followed by preaching skills. For laity, however, the character and personality of the pastor was foremost on their minds. The responses within this category point to the importance of trust, compassion, honesty, warmth, sincerity, and a strong

work ethic. While I label this category of response "character and personality of the pastor," it would be misleading to think that the five pastors were all the same personality type. I believe that they would probably score very differently on the Myers-Briggs personality inventory. Perhaps the best way to describe the importance of this category would be that laity seem to relate to the pastor as a person before they relate to the pastor as a preacher, visionary, etc. An old saying which was shared with me when I was in the process of becoming a pastor: "Once the people know that you love them they will truly listen to you." The five turnaround pastors each bore a deep love for their people and the church.

Good preaching meant preaching sermons that were relevant, powerful and clear. In three of the churches, another common response for the high quality of the sermons was that they were "biblically based." People noted that "preaching away from the pulpit" was important. A number of people also mentioned that the sermons were "positive" not "filled with anger" or not "filled with wrath." Two of the five pastors identified their preaching as being especially important; however, the laity in all five churches lifted up the importance of preaching. This may have been partly due to modesty on the part of the three, or because they did not see preaching as being quite as central as the two pastors who lifted up preaching.

The importance of vision and planning skills were more strongly affirmed by clergy than laity, although a majority of the laity affirmed the importance of this element of pastoral leadership. All five churches had developed plans and goals that included growth. The pastor was the always key driver in this process.

All five pastors, while employing different styles of leadership, were strong leaders who were willing to get out in front of their congregations and call them to

embrace a bigger vision. They also were creative leaders. One pastor told a story which took place early on in the church's turnaround, of an eighty-two-year-old member who asked if he could trim the disorderly shrubs in the front of the church. While pruning back an overgrown rose bush he found the old church cornerstone with the inscription "Forward in Faith." He shared his find with the pastor. The following Sunday "Forward in Faith" was the title of the sermon. That story was told repeatedly and the phrase "Forward in Faith" became a part of the church's new vision of itself. Another pastor told of the sermon he preached on the Sunday after their 100-year-old sanctuary was burned. With Ezekiel-like courage and vision he said, "I was not appointed to this church to preside over its funeral – the best days of this church are in the future, not the past."

As a pastor who does a lot of visitation and sees great value it in, I expected to find that visitation was especially significant for a church turning around. What proved to be the case was that the pastor's accessibility was extremely important, but that did not necessarily mean the pastor did a lot of visitation in people's homes. Three of the five pastors said they did not do much visitation in people's homes, these three churches were the largest of the five turnaround churches. Lay visitation was organized in two of these churches. The two clergy that identified home visitation as a key to growth, were from the two most rural churches. Hospital visitation was universally a much higher priority. All the pastors also sought to be available when members of the congregation were in crisis.

While only five of the twenty laypersons interviewed lifted up the pastor modeling faithfulness as an important factor, there were indications that this was

more significant that the number of responses would suggest. Each of the five

pastors clearly enjoyed great trust by the congregation. In one of the churches, a

long-time member described being initially very distrustful of the turnaround pastor

upon his arrival because the pastor was considerably more theologically

conservative than he was. Yet he described this initial distrust as becoming a

deep admiration as he saw the way this pastor lived his faith and preached his

biblical convictions. He now sees transformation of the church and himself as

evidence that "the Holy Spirit is working in this church."

Finally, these pastors were all hard workers who put in far more than forty hour

each week. One pastor said, "I've been putting in sixty to seventy hour weeks, but

that's what it takes". From their responses (e.g. "the pastor gives of himself" and

"the pastor works hard") the laity seemed to be aware of this as well.

The Role of Strategic Planning

Four of the five turnaround churches utilized a planning process to develop

clear goals and objectives for growth. What became clear through the interviews

was that strategic planning allowed these churches to change: to add worship

services, to hire new staff, to change worship styles, to create new programs, and

to raise funds. Planning was the mechanism for change. While planning was not

a guarantee of success (e.g. one church's alternate site worship service failed,

and another church's efforts to develop a high school youth program did not take

off) without it, growth and spiritual vitality were unlikely.

The four churches that engaged in strategic planning went about it in different

ways. For two of these, planning was an ongoing process that happened at a

number of different levels: among the pastor and the staff which met very

frequently to plan and evaluate, among a small core group of leaders that might meet quarterly (perhaps once a year in retreat), and among the entire congregation through church wide meetings and through church-wide surveys. In addition, one of these churches used a consulting firm to assist in their planning.

Another of the four churches that engaged in long-term planning used the administrative board as the representative body to develop and implement goals. This church often organized task forces to deal with specific projects. A task force usually was made up of persons from the administrative board but also included other persons in the church. This helped to bring new people into the planning process.

The last of the four churches that was involved in planning employed an ad hoc approach. The pastor worked one-on-one with key leaders. These individual leaders would often then take on ministries. In this church, the identification of gifts of the Holy Spirit was an important factor for determining the direction in which God was leading the church.

The Role of Momentum

Through the twenty-five interviews one of the underlying themes that emerged with great regularity for both clergy and laity was the serendipitous nature of a church turning around. As much as there were reasons for the changes that occurred, the details of which have been described through this chapter, there was also mystery and grace. For each church, as turnaround began to unfold, growth created energy and excitement. "Momentum" was a term used by three of the five pastors to describe this intangible force. One pastor said, "It was as if God brought me to the church at just the right time; and once we started to grow a

momentum quickly developed." Another pastor said, "1996 was our best growth year, everything was fitting together, we had strong momentum that gave us confidence in everything we did."

Momentum functions as an intangible factor that can help make everything else a little easier. Pastors, as well as laity, seem to be aware when it is present and also when it is absent. It can even make the difference between a pastor staying or leaving.

One pastor described his first couple of years as being especially difficult. The church had no momentum as it struggled to heal from a sexual abuse scandal involving the previous pastor. During this time the pastor considered leaving the ministry. Then a number of positive events (the church pre-school getting a skilled new director and some new people coming to the church) led to a sense of developing momentum which gave the church and the pastor the optimism and self-esteem necessary to begin to move ahead.

Summary

In this chapter the researcher reported the patterns which emerged from the data. In Chapter 5, the findings of the study are compared with the methods and tools that have emerged from the larger sphere of church growth research reviewed in Chapter 2, and conclusions are presented.

CHAPTER 5

Summary and Conclusions

There were many differences among the five turnaround churches studied. Differences in size (currently ranging in average worship attendance from 90 to nearly 400) and location (small rural town, midsize city, and major metropolitan area) added complexity to the process of looking for patterns.

Factors Contributing to Decline and Stagnation

Considerably more interview time was spent focusing on causes of turnaround and growth than on the causes of stagnation or decline. This was due to the fact that less than a third of the interviewees were present in their respective churches prior to the turnaround. In addition, since the period of stagnation had taken place a number of years in the past, details tended to be more general in nature. Based on the interviews the following factors were most commonly reported to explain what prevented the church from growing.

1. Weak Pastoral Leadership

This often took the form of pastors having low energy and little vision for change. Two of the churches identified pastors having a universalist theology that provided no impetus for evangelism.

2. Clergy Sexual Misconduct

While this area affected only two of the five churches, its effects were dramatic and long lasting. Clergy sexual misconduct seriously damaged the trust relationship of the congregations toward the pastors.

3. Absence of a Biblical Focus

Three of the five churches identified decline or stagnation being the result of the church losing its biblical bearings. The preaching and teaching of the pastor was identified as the place where this absence was most pronounced.

4. Weak Preaching

Sermons were described as boring and not relevant. Preaching tended to be done exclusively from the pulpit and sermons were often read off a manuscript.

5. An Absence of Planning or Goal Setting

A mindset of maintenance rather than mission resulted in little perceived need for planning, and setting goals for growth.

6. An Absence of Young People and Children

Three of the five churches described the church being made up primarily of seniors. With few young people, worship, and particularly music tended to remain highly traditional in style. These churches offered few programs attractive to children and non-seniors.

7. Facility Problems

Two of the five churches struggled with facilities that were either in disrepair or needing high levels of maintenance that drained the resources of the church.

While most of the factors identified as contributing to decline or stagnation are related to pastoral leadership, some of them such as a lack of planning and goal setting, the absence of young people and children, and facility problems can be addressed by laity. Laity who had been a part of the church prior to the turnaround were aware that the reasons for plateau were not exclusively related to the pastor; however, prior to turnaround laity identified a lack of hope and motivation.

Factors Contributing to Turnaround and Growth

There were eight dominant factors identified by clergy and laity as being most significant for turnaround and growth. Some of these factors functioned as the initial catalyst for turnaround, while others contributed to growth after turnaround had begun. These factors are prioritized based on the frequency of response. Pastoral leadership, the most frequently identified factor, is broken into five sub-categories.

1. Strong Pastoral Leadership

The role of pastoral leadership was identified as the single most significant factor contributing to turnaround and growth. Pastoral leadership was the catalyst for turnaround in all five churches. The specific areas of pastoral leadership lifted up, prioritized based on frequency of response were:

a. character and personality, particularly optimism, warmth, compassion, and sincerity,

b. good preaching skills, principally sermons there were clear, relevant and biblically based,

c. vision and planning skills, including the ability to lead, plan for growth, and to communicate a clear vision,

d. compassionate accessibility, which included a willingness to visit members of the congregation in crises, and being seen as a person people feel comfortable going to when needs arise,

e. models faithfulness, which involved functioning as a positive example of faithfulness and integrity.

2. New Worship Services

New services tended to be contemporary in style (three of the new services were contemporary and one was blended), and each was well planned and carefully

launched. In one of the churches, a new service was added while the church was plateaued with the new service being the initial catalyst for turnaround. In the other three churches, new services were added after turnaround had begun and the new services then accelerated growth.

3. Young People and Children

The presence of young people and children dramatically changed the dynamics of each church. Four of the five churches had few young people and children prior to turnaround. In these churches the presence of young people and children was identified as being a powerful sign of new hope that significantly contributed to turnaround.

4. Quality Ministry Staff

The growth of three of the five churches was helped by skilled staff. These staff worked in specified areas: youth ministry, music ministry, and small groups ministry. In each, there was a good relationship between the staff person and the pastor.

5. New Small Groups

Small groups were used extensively in two of the five churches to assimilate new members into the church, develop lay leadership, nurture people to grow in their faith, and strengthen bonds of caring and accountability. Since all five churches had some small groups prior to turnaround, it was the creation of new small groups that was associated with turnaround. Two of the churches identified new small groups as being the initial catalyst for turnaround.

6. Specific Programs

Walk to Emmaus, Promise Keepers, Disciple Bible Study, and Kerygma Bible Study played a significant role in strengthening the church (and sometimes drawing

new people). In three of the five churches specific programs were identified as being catalyst for turnaround.

7. Lay Leadership

The development of lay leadership was perceived as a lagging area by clergy; however, laity more readily saw it taking place. Lay leadership taking on new areas of ministry greatly expanded the capacity of the church to reach out to new people, assimilate new members, and to meet the pastoral needs of an expanding congregation.

8. Demographic Considerations

Clearly, being in a growing community can enhance growth. This was identified in two of the five churches. Yet, other growth producing factors need to be in place to benefit greatly from an influx of new people into the community. At the same time, negative demographic changes, need not reverse growth, and in one church proved to be a catalyst for outreach that translated into rapid growth.

Turnaround began shortly after the arrival of the turnaround pastor in three of the five church, and took place more gradually in the other two. Some of the above factors, such as creating new small groups and involvement with specific programs, were attempted with limited success prior to turnaround. Clergy and laity identified most of these factors as working in association with new vision and hope provided largely by the turnaround pastor.

Comparing the Results of the Study with Established Church Growth Findings

One of the perceptions of many pastors and laity in the churches of this conference is that church growth methods and tools developed in other parts of the country, or developed using nationwide data will not work here in California and Nevada. The findings of this study generally refute that perception. The following is a comparison of

the findings of this study with Hunter's "Six Mega-Strategies for Growth" and Barna's "Pastoral Leadership Factors," both of which were reviewed in Chapter 2. Both Hunter's six strategies for church growth and Barna's pastoral leadership factors reflect the growing consensus among the top church growth researchers regarding the key principles and factors of church growth.

Comparing the Findings of the Study with Hunter's Six Mega-Strategies for Growth

Three of Hunter's six mega-strategies for church growth were found in all five of the turnaround churches.

- Multiplying units. Growth can take place as churches "multiply units of various kinds (classes, choirs, groups, congregations, et al.) as recruiting groups and ports of entry for new persons." In the turnaround churches the new units created included: new worship services, new small groups, and new Bible studies.

- Developing new ministries. "Churches grow as they minister to the felt needs of undiscipled people, usually by developing new ministries." In the turnaround churches the felt needs of undiscipled people were met through warm and friendly worship services, fellowship events, and new small groups and classes.

- Planning. "Churches grow from (prayerfully) planning for the future, deciding what future achievement they intend, laying the stepping stones to get there, and implementing the plans." In each of the turnaround churches planning for growth took place under the leadership of the pastor. For two of the five churches this planning has been very extensive and nearly continuous.

In addition, the other three of Hunter's six mega-strategies were present in one or more of the turnaround churches:

- Identifying and reaching receptive people. "Churches grow as they learn how to identify and reach 'receptive people'." Two of the five churches developed strategies that targeted particular groups of people which were believed to be 'receptive'. For one church it was youth, for a second it was a large Vietnamese population.

- Reaching out across social networks. "Churches grow as they reach out across the social networks of their credible believers, especially their newest Christians." Two churches described this dynamic at work. In one church the pastor described two families being responsible for reaching and drawing into the church approximately twenty other families to which they were connected through friendship. In the other church, youth that were drawn into the church through a successful youth program often encouraged their parents to attend worship services.

- Developing culturally indigenous ministries. "Churches grow as they develop culturally indigenous ministries for the people they intend to reach." One church in particular worked hard to develop programs for inner-city children and youth. Since this targeted group was not well represented in the church community, it involved hiring staff able to bridge the cultural divide that separated the church community from this targeted group. In addition this same church began a "Generation-X" worship service also in an effort to create culturally indigenous outreach opportunities.

Barna's Pastoral Leadership Factors

Six of the seven "Pastoral Leadership Factors" which George Barna derived from his research, and which were presented in Chapter 2, were clearly present in the five turnaround churches. They are prioritized according to the frequency of responses by laity and clergy.

- <u>The selection of a new pastor.</u> The turnaround of all five churches was directly related to the appointment of a new pastor. It also is significant that each of the five turnaround pastors had previously served at least one church prior to coming to the church where turnaround took place.

- <u>Quality sermons by the pastor.</u> Good preaching was the second most common response among the laity in terms of factors that contributed to growth.

- <u>The selection of a strong leader.</u> Barna contrasts this with a leader who primarily functions as caretaker, healer, manager or consensus builder. The turnaround pastors displayed the qualities of a strong "transformational" leader which were described in Chapter 2. While the turnaround pastors may have had some innate leadership gifts, they described obtaining much of what they put into practice through continuing education at workshops, symposiums and conferences on church growth and leadership development.

- <u>A pastor who loves the people.</u> While the turnaround pastors had very different personalities (ranging from gentle to forceful) laity in all five churches identified the pastor have a deep love and concern for the congregation.

- <u>A hardworking pastor.</u> Laity were very aware of this quality, and clergy acknowledged that lots of hard work goes into leading a church to turnaround and continued growth.

- <u>A supportive staff.</u> The pastors of three of the five churches worked closely with staff, which they described as extremely vital to the overall leadership of the church.

    The other pastoral leadership factor which Barna identified was "a pastor who is able to equip laity for effective, targeted ministry." This final factor pertaining to pastors equipping laity came up mixed in the interviews; with clergy generally somewhat negative and laity generally more positive in assessing pastoral skills in this

area. Yet, in light of the growth of small groups and other ministries in the turnaround churches, I tended, as did the laity, to see more equipping of laity for ministry than the clergy identified in the interview. The clergy responses may be due to high expectations rather than poor results.

This study reveals that the large body of church growth research, particularly the work of George Hunter, Lyle Schaller, Peter Wagoner and George Barna which was reviewed in the Chapter 2, affirm the great majority of the methods and tools that were successfully used in the five turnaround churches. There was consistency both in terms of the general church growth principles as well as in the pastoral leadership factors. There were some church growth factors which Hunter or Barna identify that were not highly significant in the turnaround churches (e.g. developing culturally indigenous ministries, and equipping laity for targeted ministry). Yet, since the study is limited to five churches, these factors being absent in the data does not allow conclusions to be made regarding their ineffectiveness.

Comparison of the Findings with the Two Biblical Models Explored

In Chapter 2, two passages from Acts were explored as possible church growth models. Paul's proclamation in Athens (Acts 17) was identified as a possible model of evangelism in a culturally pluralistic setting. The method of dealing with conflict between the Hebrews and Hellenists within the Jerusalem church (Acts 6) was identified as a possible model for dealing with cultural tensions.

Paul In Athens (Acts 17)

In Chapter 2, three elements were derived from the model of evangelism that Paul employs in Athens when speaking in the pluralistic environment of the Areopagus. The group Paul was attempting to reach was characterized as being hostile or skeptical; coming from a variety of different religious backgrounds; and possessing

little or no knowledge of the gospel. The situation in Athens does not lend itself to a one to one comparison with the situations addressed by the five turnaround churches. Yet, there are similarities in terms of skepticism among the hearers, little knowledge of the gospel, and a variety of religious backgrounds present.

In each of the turnaround churches the number of people who came into the church out of a secular/unchurched background was relatively small compared to all who came into the church. One pastor estimated about one third of the total to be secular/ unchurched. In addition, while the term "skeptical" was used in three of the five churches to describe some of the people coming into the church, "hostile" would probably not be reflective of many of the people coming into the churches. Nonetheless, four of the five pastors described developing strategies for reaching unchurched persons. The following is a restatement of the three points derived from Paul's outreach in Athens, and a comparison of the parallels found in the turnaround churches.

1. No background knowledge. Paul's proclamation did not assume any previous exposure or background knowledge (either Jewish or Christian) and in light of this Paul presents foundational principles such as a single creator God. All five churches worked hard to make worship clear and understandable to newcomers. Two of the churches offered classes in the absolute basics of the faith (calling the class Christianity 101 in one of the churches). In addition, all five turnaround pastors described placing a high priority on sermons being clear and consistently focused on the basics of the faith.

2. Use of cultural bridges. Paul drew on cultural bridges to seek to connect with hearers who displayed hostility or skepticism toward himself or his message. Cultural bridges were employed in the turnaround churches. The most common and

extensively used was contemporary music which was strategically used in four of the five churches to reach unchurched people. The one church that didn't use a great deal of contemporary music also had the lowest percentage of newcomers coming from a secular/unchurched background.

Another cultural bridge was the use of an informal style of worship, which was more culturally acceptable than a more formal style of worship. One example of this was that all five turnaround pastors employed a conversational style of preaching. Lay persons often said, they didn't feel preached down to. One motivation for this stated by some of the pastors was to avoid the cultural stereotype of Christianity being aloof, self-righteous and judgmental.

3. Acceptance of modest results. In terms of results, Paul seemed to accept the relatively small positive response from the hearers, which may be indicative of the type of response that can be expected when reaching out to such a community. Not being deterred by relatively small results also seemed to be a pattern present in the turnaround churches. Pastors and laity talked about the church growing person by person. The great optimism of the pastors--who constantly accentuated the positive— allowed for relatively small results to be celebrated. While each of the five turnaround churches experienced some short periods of rapid growth, most of the growth in worship attendance was fairly gradual. In addition, statistical figures showing growth often hide the many disappointments along the way. The turnaround pastors described many of these, including: failed services, people leaving, staff not working out, and conflicts which often became personalized toward them. Discouragement due to overly unrealistic expectations did not seem to be a problem for the turnaround pastors.

Dealing with Tension in the Jerusalem Church (Acts 6:1-7)

All five churches experienced areas of tension through the period of turnaround. These tensions varied with some being centered around worship, some around music, some around theology, and some around leadership concerns. There were two key elements in the model of dealing with tension found in Acts 6:1-7: (1) the creation of new leadership to take on new areas of ministry; and (2) involvement of the entire community in the decision-making process.

The creation of new leadership too place in all five turnaround churches. Both clergy and laity affirmed that turnaround involved new people taking on important areas of ministry leadership. This was especially true in the areas of small group ministry, but also was found in outreach and evangelism, and in youth ministry.

The involvement of the entire community in the decision-making process most often took place on major decisions that dramatically affected the entire church community, such as the creation of a new worship service or deciding to change the time of worship. Such decisions prompted the pastor to seek to involve the entire community. Yet, a representative decision-making body (such as the Administrative Council) rather then the entire community was more likely to make decisions on matters that did not dramatically affect the entire community. It was noted in Chapter 2 however, that Luke T. Johnson felt that a representative body rather than the entire church community (which at the time of the Act 6 decision was very large) might have made the decision. If this view is accepted than representative bodies such as an Administrative Council would more closely parallel the Acts 6 model.

Implications of the Findings

One goal of this study was to find church growth models and tools successfully used in United Methodist Churches within this Annual Conference. By focusing on

turnaround churches, there was the added benefit of being able to focus on models and tools which were successfully employed in the difficult setting of a plateaued or declining church. The findings point to a number of models and tools which were consistently identified as significant for growth by clergy and laity in the five turnaround churches studied.

A second goal of this study was to compare the church growth models and tools that emerged from the turnaround churches with those identified as most significant by the established body of church growth research. The findings of this study were very consistent with this larger body of church growth research. This high degree of consistency is especially significant because of the common perception that the West Coast is significantly different and that church growth models and tools used successfully in other parts of the country will not work in churches in this region. This study did not attempt to assess the extent of cultural differences that may exist between the West Coast and other regions of the country. Therefore little can be said about the extent of these differences. The experience of the five turnaround churches suggests even if cultural differences do exist church growth principles, as well as many concrete models and tools, can be used effectively.

Limitations of the Study.

The churches interviewed in this study are not representative of the entire California-Nevada Annual Conference. The population (turnaround churches) represents a minority whose rapid growth is atypical compared to the experience of the majority of churches within the conference. The limited scope of the population warrants caution in using this study to make generalizations. However, it is reasonable to believe that the common elements identified as growth producing through this study are worthy of consideration for other churches desiring turnaround.

This is particularly the case in light of the high degree of consistency between the finding of this study and the larger body of church growth research. I hope that the findings of this study will be further tested by pastors and laity in other churches of the California-Nevada Annual Conference and even beyond.

One other limitation in the study is that I could not report the findings of each church with a detailed unfolding of its experience of turnaround. To do so would violate the anonymity that I assured each of the twenty-five persons interviewed, since among pastors in the conference it would be quite easy to determine the five turnaround churches. While the assurance of anonymity may have allowed the interviews to be more candid, it limited the way the findings were able to be reported.

<div align="center">Unexpected Conclusions</div>

In the early stages of planning this study, I thought that the population of turnaround churches which fit my perameters would be sufficiently large to necessitate studying a random sample from this population. However, when the population turned out to be just six churches (including Yreka), there was no need for this. The experience of a plateaued or declining church turning around is less common than I had initially believed.

The findings of the study surfaced two other unexpected results. The first of these was the extremely crucial role new worship services played in bringing about growth. This factor was readily identified by both clergy and laity in four of the five churches. In addition, two of these four had established two new services. The creation of new worship services allowed these churches to reach new populations in the community. It also served as a catalyst for developing new leadership within the congregation. The findings of the study strongly suggest that the establishment of new services can function as a powerful engine for growth.

The second unexpected result was the significance laity placed upon the character personality of the pastor. As I anticipated, strong preaching and skills in leadership were identified as especially important, but with even greater regularity character and personality factors such as "positive", "personable and open," "involved with people," and "great personality" were identified as being crucial for the turnaround.

Practical Applications of the Findings of the Study

A long-term member from one of the turnaround churches said, "you wouldn't recognize this place if you came back after being away for the last few years." This was a common sentiment. Each of the five churches studied experienced a great deal of change. This included not just the influx of new persons, but major structural changes such as new worship services, new staff positions, and new decentralized forms of decision-making. From my own experience as a pastor, it is very clear that such change in established churches does not come easily. In retrospect its not hard to see the value of instituting changes, when they result in turnaround and new life in a church. Yet, changes are made looking forward without any guarantees of success.

The primary application of the findings of this study is to facilitate pastors and lay leaders to institute the types of structural changes needed for turnaround. Forty-eight percent of the churches of the conference (182 out of a total of 377) have declined in average worship attendance since 1991 (Journal). Since beginning this study, I have had over 50 requests for its findings from other pastors in this conference. There appears to be considerable interest in turnaround. Many of these requests have come from pastors who are seeking to make the types of structural changes which show up in the findings. Some pastors have expressed their hope that the findings of this study will provide concrete support that they can draw on to "sell" to their congregations the need for pushing ahead with significant structural changes. One pastor described

trying to add a new worship service for the last five years, but not being able to develop enough support in the congregation to risk such a major change. That pastor's comments stuck a chord deep within me.

In 1994 after steady growth for a few years, Yreka plateaued when average worship attendance was around 150. For the next three years we were stuck at that level of worship attendance. From church growth classes with George Hunter at Asbury I had become well acquainted with the most current church growth principles, methods and tools available. From this, I was convinced that we needed to start a new service that would allow us to offer more than a primarily traditional style of worship. Yet, for three years, I could not convince the congregation that we should start a new service. Despite making a strong case for this change using the best church growth research available, the resistance was too great.

Pastors of newly established churches often don't understand the difficulty of leading an established church to risk making deep structural changes. I felt as if I was putting the entire 150-year history of the Yreka church on the line. In addition, there were others who feared success, feeling that it would bring division as well as cause the church to lose its "close-knit family" atmosphere.

One of the turning points came when I began meeting with three pastors in an accountability group. It just so happened that two of the three pastors were in churches that had recently added a new worship service. I know that I would not have been able to lead the Yreka church to add a new service without having access to the experience of two churches that successfully did what I was seeking to accomplish. Part of what broke through the deep resistance toward a second service was my being able to offer concrete examples of two other sister churches that had grown tremendously by acting on the same plan that we were considering.

This is the type of practical application of the findings which I hope other pastors and lay leaders will be able to employ. While I have the benefit of knowing details beyond what is reported in the findings of this study, I believe that the findings alone may help pastors who are dealing with similar situations. Pastors and lay leaders who are trying to enlist broader support for some of the changes affirmed by the findings from the five turnaround churches may be those most able to find practical application of the findings.

Since the study was designed to maintain anonymity of those who were interviewed, a detailed unfolding of the turnaround process that took place in the five churches studied is not possible. Yet, despite this, the findings represent the experience of five other churches in this conference that reversed long term plateau and decline and experienced dramatic growth. It is my hope that the experience of these turnaround churches can empower other pastors, like myself, who find themselves needing something a little more concrete and close to home than that which is available through books by Schaller, Hunter and Barna. To facilitate this sort of application, the findings will be summarized and presented in a concise form through the conference newspaper. In addition, more detailed presentations of the findings will be distributed to those who make requests. I intend to distribute via e-mail significant portions of the study. It is my hope that those who see value in the findings of this study will encourage further sharing among churches within the conference. Such communication networks, via e-mail, have already been developed for sharing sermon ideas. I will be exploring the establishment of a parallel network for pastors and lay leaders interested in church growth methods and tools used successfully in local churches.

The findings of this study point to three other areas where further research would be beneficial. First, since the addition of new worship services emerged as a factor related to turnaround and growth in the churches studied, further research on the process of adding new services would be beneficial, with particular attention to the pitfalls that can arise when churches change in this way. Second, the issue of future pastoral leadership is an area where further study is needed. Four of the five churches studied, continued to be led by the turnaround pastor. The one church where the turnaround pastor left, was the only one to experience significant decline following the turnaround. Third, the whole area of dealing with conflict in the local church represents an area needing further study. Turnaround is a dynamic process that may help resolve some areas of conflict, while at the same time creating new areas of tension in the church.

Personal Benefits from the Study.

The main motivation for this study of turnaround churches, was my own desire to understand more clearly the factors that contributed to turnaround and growth within Yreka UMC where I have pastored for the last six years. Clearly, the factors which brought about turnaround and growth in Yreka are very consistent with those that brought about turnaround and growth in the five churches studied. In addition, the experience of studying successful churches in depth is exceedingly fruitful. At times it felt like I was looking into a crystal ball and seeing Yreka's future. A specific example of this involved one turnaround church that struggled with a declining traditional service along side of a growing contemporary service. This church made repeated efforts to bring about growth in the traditional service, but these efforts were unsuccessful. Tensions between the two congregations have continued to grow, and now are openly identified by nearly everyone in the church as a major concern.

With a declining traditional service and a growing contemporary service at Yreka, it seemed likely that were heading toward similar tensions in the future. Seeing what transpired in another church, prompted me to explore reconfiguring our two services to find a better balance. This last January, following a carefully thought out decision-making process that involved the entire congregation, we moved from a 9:00 a.m. contemporary service and a 11:00 a.m. traditional service, to two blended services, the first at 8:30 a.m. and the second at 10:00 a.m. In addition, where we had previously only offered Sunday school at the early service, we now offered Sunday school at both services. Three months into this new worship configuration, attendance is up about 10 percent and the tension that was beginning to develop between the two services has vanished.

I expect there to be many additional applications coming out of the learning that I have received from this study that will positively affect my ministry in the years to come.

Appendix A

California-Nevada Annual Conference Turnaround Churches 1984-1996

A V E R A G E   W O R S H I P   A T T E N D A N C E

District	Church	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1984-90	1990-96
Delta	Church A	67	71	71	71	66	68	56	61	59	102	114	126	101	-16%	80%
Fresno	Church B	130	125	120	118	129	142	121	159	184	204	194	200	217	-7%	79%
Nev-Sierrε	Church C	177	182	165	169	177	184	182	225	276	295	321	335	330	3%	81%
Nev.-Sierr	Church D	91	84	84	83	72	79	83	88	107	142	180	172	209	-9%	152%
San Jose	Church E	185	170	151	132	110	117	114	117	186	168	168	300	330	-38%	189%
Shasta	Yreka UMC	99	99	92	92	86	93	101	112	114	128	131	155	151	2%	50%
Conf. Ave.		109						112						123	3%	10%

YREKA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
Fairchild and Cedar   P.O. Box 760   Yreka, California 96097
Church Office (916) 842-4291   Parsonage 842-3342
Rev. David L. Samelson, Pastor

May 1, 1998

Rev. John Doe
First United Methodist Church
2000 Smith Road
Anytown, CA 90001

Dear John,

I am studying turnaround churches in our conference for my doctoral dissertation at Asbury Theological Seminary. First UMC is one of a small group of churches that satisfy the perameters I have established for what constitutes a "turnaround church" in the study.

My study is of churches that had been plateaued or declining for the period 1984-1990, which experienced at least 50 percent growth in average worship attendance over the period 1990-1996.   First UMC experienced cumulative growth of (minus) – X% for the period 1984-1990 and cumulative growth of XX% for the period 1990 to 1996.

If you are willing to participate, I will interview you, along with four laypersons: your lay leader or another current leader in the church, a long time member who has been active for the entire 1984 -1996, and two active members who joined after 1990.

Prior to the interview, I would like the individual members of the Administrative Council to complete a brief survey which takes about 8   12 minutes (copy enclosed). The survey will assist me in preparing for the interviews.   Following the completion of the brief survey by the Administrative Council, I would work with you to arrange a date during August or September, in which I would come to Anytown and interview you and the four laypersons. All information in the interviews will be kept confidential and anonymous, and will only be used for the purpose of the study. In the dissertation, your church and the other turnaround churches will be referred to by number and not mentioned by name.

Timetable for churches agreeing to be part of the study:	
June - July 1998	Administrative Council to complete brief survey.
Aug. - Sept. 1998	Interviewing of clergy and four laypersons.
Nov. - Dec. 1998	Preliminary analysis sent to the clergy of each church being studied for accuracy verification.

The study is to understand the methods, ideas and programs that have led to turnaround. It is my hope that the study will be of value to pastors and laity of plateaued or declining churches who seek the sort of turnaround that you have experienced.

I will call you next week to see if you are willing to participate in this study.

With Christ's peace,

David Samelson

Enclosure   Administrative Council Survey

Appendix C

Administrative Council Survey

The following questions are part of a study of "turnaround churches" in the California-Nevada Conference of the United Methodist Church. The turnaround churches being studied are those which based on average worship attendance, grew 3 percent or less for the period 1984-1990 and then grew 50 percent or more the period 1990-1996. The information from this survey will remain anonymous.

1. You are: *(circle)* female   male

         Age 19 or younger   20-34   35-49   50-64   65 or older

2. What year did you become active in this church? _____

3. Are you surprised your church is being studied as a "turnaround church"? _____

4. What caused your church to grow? *(try to list three or four growth producing factors)*

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

Answer either 5a or 5b depending on when you came to the church:

5a. If you came to the church before 1990, describe the new people who have come to your church: _____

   _____

5b. If you came to the church after 1990, describe what drew you to the church:

   _____

   _____

6. How did the pastor help the church grow?

   _____

   _____

7. How did the lay (non-clergy) leadership of the church help the church grow?

   _____

   _____

Thank you for your help with this study.

Appendix D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. As I share with you the average worship attendance and membership data of this church over the last twenty years are there any elements of the data that surprise you?

2. Before this church began to grow what factors contributed most to plateau or decline?

3. How would you describe the growth of this church since the turnaround began? (rapid, gradual, in clumps, etc.)

4. Describe the new people who are coming to the church?

5. What are the major factors you see contributing to the growth of this church? Was a specific church growth program employed?

6. Describe the leadership role of the pastor in this process?

7 Describe the leadership role of the lay leaders in this process?

8. Did a theological transition precede or accompany this growth?   If so, how would you characterize this transition?

9. Is growth slowing?   If so, what factors do you see contributing to this?

10. If you could name the three most important factors this church stopped declining/stagnating and started growing, what would they be?

11. If you could name the three most important factors for this church to sustain this growth, what would they be?

Appendix E

Church A

	1984	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1984-90	1990-96
Ave. Worship Attend.	67	56	61	59	102	114	128	101	-16%	80%
Membership	190	171	171	177	188	194	211	225	-10%	32%
Ave. Sun. Schl. Attd.	36	24	30	23	37	56	77	31	-33%	29%
Baptisms	1	5	4	1	11	13	9	18	400%	260%
Joining--Conf. of Faith	1	1	2	4	7	10	15	15	0%	1400%
Grand Total Paid	32856	50810	53609	55498	66625	80442	117851	73214	55%	44%

Appendix E

Church B

	1984	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1984-90	1990-96
Ave. Worship Attend.	130	121	159	184	204	194	200	217	-7%	79%
Membership	352	318	329	334	358	358	329	346	-10%	9%
Ave Sun. Ch. Schl. At	77	82	82	85	100	76	65	33	6%	-60%
Baptisms	18	6	18	8	17	13	8	11	-67%	83%
Joining--Conf. of Faith	13	2	25	20	30	25	6	20	-85%	900%
Grand Total Paid	77664	120116	126326	147804	135617	148575	145456	140413	55%	17%

Appendix E

Church C

	1984	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1984-90	1990-96
Ave. Worship Attend.	177	182	225	276	295	321	335	330	3%	81%
Membership	414	454	500	588	632	680	671	681	10%	50%
Ave. Sun. Schl. Attd.	71	75	96	77	83	102	100	102	6%	36%
Baptisms	47	16	7	35	35	20	30	27	-66%	69%
Joining--Conf. of Faith	34	15	47	92	44	53	28	34	-56%	127%
Grand Total Paid	108715	169334	213251	291196	237372	230539	210836	229791	56%	36%

Church D

	1984	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1984-90	1990-96
Ave. Worship Attend.	91	83	88	107	142	180	172	209	-9%	152%
Membership	241	219	234	248	244	246	232	246	-9%	12%
Ave. Sun. Schl. Attd.	40	52	40	48	50	55	70	76	30%	44%
Baptisms	7	14	7	16	11	3	2	24	100%	71%
Joining--Conf. of Faith	13	18	13	17	17	15	18	28	38%	56%
Grand Total Paid	61065	79765	69110	72715	79726	101822	100432	136214	31%	71%

Appendix E

Church   E

	1984	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1984-90	1990-96
Ave. Worship Attend.	185	114	117	186	168	168	300	330	-38%	189%
Membership	490	357	330	341	331	329	329	348	-27%	-3%
Ave. Sun. Schl. Attd.	50	38	35	75	90	60	65	80	-24%	111%
Baptisms	8	6	8	23	3	5	8	10	-25%	67%
Joining--Conf. of Faith	7	5	7	47	7	3	6	16	-29%	220%
Grand Total Paid	194292	204657	149438	193041	217448	187770	232104	517387	5%	153%

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