

ABSTRACT

EXPLORATION INTO SMALL, RURAL, DECLINING, NEAR END OF LIFE-CYCLE CHURCH TURNAROUND IN THE WESLEYAN AND UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

This study was undertaken to determine whether the body of literature regarding turnaround for small, rural, declining, near end of life-cycle churches could be shown to have reasonably worked in Wesleyan and/or United Methodist congregations meeting those descriptors. The life cycle of the church references Rev. Dr. George Bullard's graph of the same.

This was a pre-intervention, narrative historical and phenomenological sampling of five churches from the two denominations from within the United States that had demonstrated turnaround. The five churches were identified by asking judicatory leaders and asking them to recommend churches that fit the criteria. These five churches were surveyed by a written survey and a follow-up interview phone call. The pastor and two key laypersons were surveyed from each church. Judicatory leaders of the pastors were interviewed. Utilizing narrative, historical, phenomenological methods, the study lets the voices of the participants engage the questions and then a generalized mosaic of their methods was exegeted and compared with a composite of the recommendations of the literature reviewed. Due to the needs of confidentiality, the participants are not identified directly in this study.

The study concluded that the generalized mosaic of actions, attitudes, postures, and practices of the five churches did indeed display general congruence with the recommendations of the literature review. These findings could be helpful to similar churches seeking turnaround and thus small, rural, declining, near end of life-cycle churches do not necessarily need to complete the trajectory of the life-cycle and end in death. Turnaround is possible, albeit very costly.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

EXPLORATION INTO SMALL, RURAL, DECLINING, NEAR END OF LIFE-CYCLE
CHURCH TURNAROUND IN THE WESLEYAN AND UNITED METHODIST CHURCH.

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Marcel Allen Lamb

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By

Marcel Allen Lamb

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My hope is that this dissertation will help some church or pastor find their way to turnaround a church that others think is hopeless.

Chapter One

The Nature of the Problem

Overview of the Chapter

Chapter one addresses the question of how small, rural, declining, near end of life-cycle churches (SRDNELC) in the Wesleyan and United Methodist denominations managed to turn around and begin to grow again. There is a section describing how this research topic came to be a passionate puzzle for the author as well as sections speaking about the problem of SRDNELC church turnaround and its relative rarity and what the purpose of this project is. Particular research questions are listed followed by the project's rationale, key definitions, delimitations, and a macro-scale review of the relevant literature. A brief explanation of key elements of the data collection method is presented followed by an overview of the dissertation.

Autobiographical Introduction

When I entered the ministry as a student back in 1991, I was assigned a circuit of two very small, near death churches in rural Indiana. I was there to basically preach on Sunday and make the occasional hospital call or perform a funeral. I could not even administer sacraments. I journeyed with them for the first four years of my education and ministry. Those people loved me and I loved them, but it began to dawn on me that they were dying, not just natural human death, rather their churches were rattling toward their final throes. They were good Christians doing the best they could in old buildings located in places that most people didn't live or go to anymore. Of the three churches I served during those years, one of them closed, another of them merged quite successfully with another congregation, relocated, and is doing quite well, and the third is still hanging on by its fingernails. From this, I have learned that the challenges facing

small declining churches are very real, but one cannot easily project what the future holds for them. Intervening events can make a huge difference in their futures. I want to know which kind of interventions can bring about a positive future.

I continued to pastor in various locations and eventually came to serve at a small church in mid-Michigan farm country. Six great years were spent working with the saints at that struggling church. However, when costs vastly outstripped their prospects for income, weary from years of small returns if any, the congregation voted to close. For some, it was a great relief. For others, it was tremendously painful. I found myself experiencing the latter emotion. For all we had attempted, none of our efforts paid off with great enough returns to pull us out of decline. What we did in ministry had bought us time. It had extended our life-line, but it hadn't brought about a reversal. From this I learned that churches need to do more than buy time; they have to build reverse momentum so as to turn their trend-lines upward again. I also learned that I never wanted to be part of a church closing ever again; merely staying open is not a satisfactory mission for any church. I want to know what kind of interventions can do more than just buy time; I want to discover how to alter the church life-cycle so that these dear churches can thrive.

After leaving that church, I was sent to northern Michigan where I served two congregations. I quickly realized that one of them was not viable nor likely to be made viable because of needed repairs to the building and declining population in the area. Those two churches were able to merge and are writing a new story together with better resources. From these experiences I began this dissertation with a desire to find those situations and useful practices that when introduced into end of life, declining rural churches have worked in SRDNELC churches to reorient them into thriving, growing, healthier churches. This project

was created to learn from the experiences and wisdom of others from both literature and real pastors, real churches, and real experiences.

Statement of the Problem

“Every year more than 4000 churches close their doors compared to just over 1000 new church starts!” (Krejcir, website).

Over 50,000,000 Americans live in a rural setting. That’s roughly 1 out of 7! Not only is there a significant population in these communities, but the needs are just as significant or greater than their urban/suburban counterparts. Drug and alcohol abuse, breakdown of the family, physical abuse and child neglect, poverty and unemployment describe several of the challenges facing these communities. Tragically, a dramatic demise in the presence and influence of the church is accelerating the destructive impact of these problems. Many churches are quietly dying off without so much as a fight (unless it is among themselves!) (Rural American Ministries webpage).

An overwhelming number of churches in America are small, rural and in decline, and there seems to be a dearth of effective transformation need-specific resources available to turn these trends around. There must be things that can make turnaround possible. There are opinions, books, articles, blogs, and other sources that purport to know what should be done. There must be places where turnaround has happened. To many struggling congregations, it seems that a confluence of factors worked to preclude the beneficial outcomes they hoped and prayed for as they used this seminar, that book, or this growth concept to try to turn around. It is likely possible that some locations for churches are no longer viable places for churches to meet. It may be probable that the practice of sending part-time or inexperienced clergy as a stop-gap to fill these pulpits is not providing the kind of leadership needed for a turnaround. It is also likely that many churches, for a multiplicity of reasons, work to sabotage the things that could work for their success. These are issues that highlight the challenges of this problem for SRDNELC churches in the Wesleyan and United Methodist denominations. However, the question that

drove this research was not what keeps a church from turning around (although understanding things like that can be helpful) but where SRDNELC churches have turned around what did they do, what made those practices successful, and can other SRDNELC churches use them to their benefit?

Many times prescriptions are given that are appropriations of techniques used in other dissimilar settings, whether large church, urban, or theoretical projections, from literature and scholarship. The literature were compared to the actual experiences of some SRDNELC churches. SRDNELC churches that have turned around were compared to the corpus of literature to discern what unique things their experiences offer. Sometimes things work because of background matters entirely beyond the control of a local church that infuse a congregation's environment with new life, and these need to be weeded out from our list of helpful practices. Other times, despite every good effort, background matters create a disastrous synergy that only hastens the closing of a church. Churches do close every day, but every church should have the ability to leave some kind of legacy even if a location must be abandoned; the best legacy is thriving life as a vibrant congregation.

Purpose of the Project

This project is for the purpose of finding prescriptions for the turnaround of SRDNELC churches according to the literature and to find some SRDNELC Wesleyan and United Methodist Churches with demonstrated turnaround to compare the recommendations of existing literature against the real-life churches that have turned around from decline.

Research Questions

RQ #1. What are the leadership behaviors and competencies (self-reported) of the pastor and church?

In any endeavor, there are competencies and practices (behaviors) that promote success and those that detract from the same. This research question sought to uncover the leadership behaviors and competencies that lend to success. Every context is unique and every leader is likewise. What types of leaders have turned around the extremely challenged churches that comprise this study? Was that leader specifically trained for this setting? If so, how? Are there certain leadership assets more likely to work in small, rural, near end of life-cycle declining churches? Does age and education matter?

RQ #2. What are the attitudes and postures of the congregation as related to turnaround?

Given the high number of plateaued, declining, and dying churches, there is a qualitative difference between such churches and those who pull out of the extreme situation of a SRDNELC church into a turnaround. It is probable that a significant factor in this change is found in the attitudes of the church community and the way these are practiced in the fellowship and in the local community with people who do not attend the church.

RQ #3. What attitudes and actions made the church healthy and attractive?

Something changed in order for these churches to turnaround; most likely it was health and attraction behaviors of the church. Knowing more about these changes is very important.

RQ #4. How and for what rationale was the church organized regarding infrastructure and administration so that growth was supported?

Every church has administrative practices and structures. What is different about churches that have turned around? Can any of their success be attributable to changes in administration and infrastructure?

Rationale for the Project

The first reason for this study is the sheer number of declining, rural small churches in the United States. Many established denominations are closing more churches each year than they are planting. In spite of bleak forecasts, there are a great many small churches that are seedbeds for persons going into full-time Christian ministry and mission. Likewise, a great majority of pastors will spend time serving in such settings and it would be great if both church and pastor had clear paths forward into futures with hope delineated for them.

The second reason for this study is that these churches are filled with people who love Christ and love their community; they have been at it for generations. They deserve a fighting chance of leaving the best legacy for the future: a thriving congregation for the upcoming generations. People who attend SRDNELC churches are no less deserving of good discipleship, powerful worship, and enduring hope than are persons attending mega-churches or large city churches.

The third reason for this study is that the church in North America is not as influential as it once was. Christianity is out of favor with the popular people who have captivated the zeitgeist with a siren call of the ancient evil of 'bread and circuses'. The church is in competition with an entertainment and entitlement culture. How can the great many little churches in little places speak prophetically so as to help the heartlands of our nation shake off the stupor of sensualism and awaken to spiritual revival in Christ? Surely, some benefit will also

derive for other churches as well, especially since this study chose to look at the practices needed to turn churches that were, for all intents and purposes, on hospice back into thriving, vibrant, evangelistic congregations that are Christian and therefore countercultural.

The fourth reason for this study is that leaders need effective training so that they can be successful for Christ in small rural churches just as much as in larger city churches. How can we find ways to empower pastors to face the challenges that most of them will encounter?

The fifth reason for this study is that even in those small communities where almost nobody lives or goes anymore, there are still many people who are not being reached for Christ and the angst and despair of the SRDNELC church is not only currently not reaching them, but in their defeated attitude they are actively turning people off, maybe even hardening them to the message of the gospel. Such an outcome is not acceptable, and this is a missional purpose to discover how to turn around these congregations that could and should be the churches that reach the lost around them.

Definition of Key Terms

Active Members: Those persons attending a church for 36 or more services per year who give regularly (weekly or monthly) to their church.

Church Life-Cycle: This represents a curve that begins with the establishment of a church, represents an upward swing with growth, health, and vitality for a number of years and then after four or five decades begins to plateau and then decline. If something is not done to reset a church life-cycle, then a church will likely close after 80-100 years.

Declining End of Life Cycle or Stage Church: This is a church that has plateaued at an attendance of forty or below for four or more years and/or has been dropping in active attendance

each year. This was most usually, but not necessarily, a church that had been around seventy or more years in its present location and may have hired a less than full-time pastor.

Less than full-time Pastor: There are a number of ways a small church may employ clergy for leadership. There may be pastors who completely volunteer, who are bi-vocational by holding non-church employment alongside the pastorate, and pastors who are assigned to more than one local church.

Small Church: Generally speaking, for the purposes of this paper, a small church is less than 120 active members. A small church that fits the parameters for study because it was declining will generally have had less than forty in active attendance in its time of decline.

Rural Church: A church located in a region or town that has a general population of less than 5,000 within ten square miles of the actual church location. (United States Department of Agriculture webpage).

Turnaround Church: There are a multitude of synonyms which could be used to describe the process of a church returning to vitality, but for the purpose of this paper, the term turnaround has been selected. This represents a church that has five or more years of growth in active attendance per year, has a growing number of ministry/mission expressions, and reports persons being converted to Jesus Christ annually.

Delimitations

This study aimed specifically at extremely challenged small churches in rural areas at the end of the church life-cycle. If working actions can be identified that effectively turned these very troubled churches around, then it is likely that those practices might work for less dramatically struggling churches and may even be appropriated into other settings. This study

sought out SRDNELC churches that had consistently plateaued at a level of attendance forty or below for four or more years, and/or had been dropping by 5% or greater in active attendance per year. These rural churches were in a region or town that had a general population less than 5,000 within ten square miles of the actual church location. The active attendance of these churches was less than forty people per week when turnaround began. These churches demonstrated considerable difficulty with finances. This financial difficulty may be described as less than full-time clergy, not paying bills, or funding church operations through memorials and bequests, and in such cases the cost of the clergy to the church was often a majority or even super-majority of the annual budget.

The available and relevant literature was studied and combed for strategic values and prescriptions for turnaround. The greater weight of this study was given to finding and learning from five key congregations that most closely matched the criteria above during their period of decline and that turned their congregations around. Those churches now reflect approximately five or more years of growth in active attendance each year, a growing number of ministry/mission expressions, and reported persons being converted to Jesus Christ annually. The key point was to identify useful and possibly transferrable practices so that other congregations might benefit. It is most important that a listening posture was adopted as this study aimed to find congregations whose experiences were the laboratories where successful approaches were field tested. Alongside this, the practices that have worked in these real world settings were compared and contrasted with information and techniques combed from the existing literature.

Review of Relevant Literature

This study was focused on SRDNELC churches and turnaround, so topics surveyed in the literature included sources on small churches, turnaround, or some similar synonym for a return to vitality, church health, ministry in a rural context, leadership, pastoral leadership, conflict resolution, and managing change. The purpose was to read broadly enough to cover the topic until a saturation of prescriptive and descriptive understanding was gleaned from the literature. Some key authors regarding small and rural churches were Anthony G. Pappas, Gary L. McIntosh, Michael Montgomery, Brandon J. O'Brien, William E. Ramsden, Arthur T. Roxby III, Lyle Schaller, Randall Schlecht, and Ed Stetzer. On the matter of turnaround and transformation, key authors studied were Alice Mann, Ron Crandall, Shannon O'Dell, Kevin Owen, Gordon E. Penfold, Kenneth E. Priddy, and Thom S. Rainer. Rainer's book, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, was extremely helpful. Every author in the literature review contributed to an overall prescription for small, rural church turnaround that was carefully coaxed from the literature review and reduced to an overall outline. That prescription can be found in the beginning of chapter four.

The format of the literature review early established an exploration of the biblical and theological foundations for church turnaround and fruitful church outcomes. Sources of and for church health and growth were discussed by first delineating the negative postures and practices of churches and those leading them that forestall and preclude church health and fruitfulness. Matters like sin and disobedience, inaction and apathy, selfishness or self-orientation, the lack of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, leadership issues, lack of or faulty vision, failings in discipleship, and worker shortages were discussed because prior to a good prescription, a thorough diagnosis is the best way to recommend the 'right medicine'.

The literature review turned its focus to the history of the study of decline and barriers to turnaround by surveying studies, authors, and recommendations from the past. Then the study turned to key concepts and definitions to flesh out matters that are particularly key to this dissertation and its scope regarding SRDNELC churches. George Bullock's graph of the Life Cycle and Stages of Congregational Development was presented (Figure 2.1). The version used is a very fleshed out model and its discussion is key to understanding factors operating in each level of the church life-cycle. This was followed by a description of noted gaps in the literature. For instance, some key authors would tell churches that fit this dissertation study that they should close, merge, or find some other path.

Despite the need, in many cases, to generate a recommendation by noting the negative factors that preclude health, growth, fruitfulness, and, thereby turnaround and describe a positive replacement for the negative factor, the literature served up a great deal of data that came together in a thorough prescription for SRDNELC church turnaround.

Research Methodology

Participants

This study used qualitative narrative inquiry methodology to compare the responses gleaned from the SRDNELC churches studied with the prescriptions of the literature review regarding methods of turnaround for churches. This involved a few stages of sorting and evaluation. The first action was contacting judicatory leaders in the Wesleyan and United Methodist Churches to solicit their providing churches that fit the project criteria. From those churches that were identified, statistical and demographic information was evaluated to select a purposive sample of five churches for study. This number was limited due to time constraints,

project scope and manageability, and available financial resources for the study, to say nothing of the difficulty in finding churches that met the criteria that were willing to participate. After these churches were selected, an essay response questionnaire that was subjective in nature was sent to the pastor of each church. A different essay survey was sent to two laypersons, who were selected by the pastor, from each church. The judicatory leaders were interviewed to provide answers to a survey designed for them. When the questionnaires were returned, they were analyzed for comparative similarities and key differences. These questionnaires for clergy, two key laypersons, and judicatory leadership with good knowledge of the church's turnaround process were used for further clarification and triangulation through multiple perspectives. Follow-up phone calls were made with the respondents from each studied church for further clarification based on their answers to the questionnaires they were given. Per Institutional Review Board requirements, questions during these follow up calls could only seek clarification related to the questions they answered on the written surveys. Because the study group sample was from such a highly select group and of such a small number, the Institutional Review Board deemed it necessary to anonymize all data. No specific quantitative data from the churches was shared in order to prevent the churches or respondents from being identified. In this same vein, the survey and phone interview data had to be redacted to conform to the Institutional Review Board's requirements for privacy. However, great care was taken to tabulate each respondent's answers as closely to verbatim as possible so as to retain the phenomenological insight of the data. Due to the redaction and since only elaboration was permitted and no new questions could be asked, written survey and phone follow-up responses are commingled in the tables found in Appendix F.

Type of Research

This pre-intervention qualitative study was a narrative historical and phenomenological approach for this dissertation. From the analysis of these data sources with comparison to the strategies from the literature review, parallels and anomalies were reported in a historical and phenomenological manner, and summary observations were used to determine whether the real world experiences of these studied churches were comparable to the prescriptions of the literature review. These findings were shared with either the pastor or a key leader of the church for the purpose of member checking. Member checking is a process in which a researcher shares their interpretation of a person's answers to see whether they have understood what that person actually meant to say. Additionally, an outside expert church consultant was brought in to review the entire project as another layer to enhance the research methodology.

Data Analysis

While questionnaires were being returned, they were coded (Sensing, 202) and cross-compared within each church for triangulation of perspectives among the church participants and the emergence of suggestive trends both positive and negative. Initial indexing was designed to capture major themes, while secondary coding worked to discover meta-themes of the originals. After this level of coding was completed, a phone call was made to the participants from each church for elaboration and for the member checking procedure outlined above. Subsequent to the analysis of each church, the entire set of churches was compared and contrasted for similarities and significant divergences. These results were then compiled into a matrix. Trends and outliers that emerged from the comparisons and contrasts within the matrix that marked likely causative factors were compared against the prescriptions for church turnaround from the literature review for further trends and differences.

Generalizability

This study should be replicable for anyone following the same protocols. However, due to the really small sample size, the results of this study cannot be said to offer high statistical reliability. A researcher following these protocols would likely discover unique churches that might have variant stories to tell, but the overall outcome should show similarity. Nonetheless, it should be informative and generate useful insights for other SRDNELC churches to consider if they desire turnaround. Also, it is reasonable to state that this test of the prescriptions of the literature could be useful in evaluating their use in other churches.

Project Overview

Chapter two performed a biblical, theological, and historical overview of the issue and studied multiple sources of literature to glean the prescriptions of these sources for church turnaround.

Chapter three delineated in depth the research design and subsequent methods of analysis that were employed in this dissertation.

Chapter four presented an analysis of the collected data with respect to the four research questions and provided a venue for the studied churches to speak phenomenologically about their experiences.

Chapter five reported the findings of the project, the ministry implications, limitations of this study, unexpected observations, and possible future directions for this study to take.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Overview of Chapter

Chapter Two reviews relevant literature for the purpose of understanding the current thinking on small, rural declining church renewal. There is description of the literature surveyed followed by an exploration of the biblical and theological themes most relevant to this study. After that, there is an explication of the precedent studies more accurately describing the problem and any relevant history. A survey of theories, practices, and practitioners is undertaken. Key concepts and definitions are presented followed by an analysis of gaps in the literature as relates to the study of how to turn around small, rural, declining, near end of life-cycle churches. A discourse on the design for researching the turnaround practices of churches matching the dissertation's criteria is laid out. This chapter concludes with a brief review of key points.

Description of Literature Surveyed

For this dissertation, certain general topics guided the selection of reading materials to drive a full-orbed survey of relevant and comparatively recent literature. A great amount of material was available on revitalization, turnaround churches, comeback churches, church growth, breaking growth barriers, and leading church turnaround (regardless of which adjective is synonymously used in place of the word 'turnaround'). There was a good amount of material on the challenges that small churches face that differ from the challenges of larger churches. There was a subsequently smaller amount of literature addressing rural churches in decline. The purpose of this survey was to determine the general landscape of approaches to address the turnaround of small, rural,

near end of life cycle, declining churches (SRNEDLC). Much more specifically, this literature review of turnaround related matters was undertaken to create a comparison between the literature and the actual practices of a sampling of this type of church within the United Methodist and/or the Wesleyan Churches that have effected turnaround. Readings were done in several clusters of topics. Turnaround churches from Lyle Schaller and also from Gene Wood, Ron Crandall, and several dissertations represent one cluster. Small church growth and revitalization from authors like Christian Schwarz were also studied. Articles on turnaround and revitalization taken from “The Great Commission Journal” were surveyed as well as several articles dealing with the small church in America coming from Outreach Magazine. A select cluster of books dealing with rural congregational renewal proved helpful.

Biblical & Theological Foundations

Soteriology: God’s Redemptive Purpose in the World

From the opening chapters of Genesis, it is clear that God intended a healthy, blessed, and perpetuating world. However, with the entrance of sin in the world, chaos, disorder, disease, and dysfunction blighted that good. The effects of the human fall into sin have harmed all of creation, yet God’s desire to restore creation and humanity has been the program of divine agency ever since. Salvation as God intends it is an overarching program, redeeming human souls and then redeeming the whole created order.

The Bible’s story of salvation history begins and ends with references to symbolic trees. We find the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:9). In the book of Revelation we find the tree of life again in the final eschatological vision of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22:2); its leaves are for the healing of the nations, and there will no longer be any curse.

The tree of life may be symbolized by the golden lampstand in the tabernacle. The vertical shaft, with its three branches on each side and its cups ‘shaped like almond flowers with buds and blossoms’ (Ex. 25:34 NIV) gives the impression of a stylized tree. The trees in the Garden of Eden have the potential for both blessing (immortality) and cursing (the fruit that leads to death). Thus we see the ambiguity of symbolism of trees in the Bible.

Sandwiched between Genesis and Revelation is the tree, the cross of salvation, which is the ultimate ground of both curse and blessing, judgment and healing. (Leland Ryken 890).

As we will discuss in greater detail, God has moved to partner with persons, peoples, nations, and ultimately the Church to advance His soteriological enterprise.

While God has partnered with human agents, the great advances have always come entirely at God’s initiative and agency.

Old Testament

“Then God blessed them and said, ‘Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.’” Gen. 1:28 NLT.

Enwrapped in Edenic paradise, humanity was created pure, holy, good, and blessed. In blessing Adam and Eve, God gave the mandate to be fruitful and multiply, to grow in number, and to rightly steward the creation around them. This state of blessedness represents the divine ideal. (Gen. 1:28). There will be no speculation herein regarding matters of pre-Fallen life expectancy or cycles as the presence of the Tree of Life at least alludes to a curative should humanity have needed help to stay alive. From this pre-Fallen ideal, we can discern, in broad strokes, some of God’s archetype for human society. This was to be a society of persons behaving toward Creation in manners that proportionally and relationally reflected God’s inner harmony of unity in trinity. This propagation of a holy society would have experienced unique fellowship, harmony,

love, and rewarding purpose in human community and in unfettered delight in union with God. Before any fruitfulness at all came to pass, humans yielded to temptation and ended the ideal, thereby breaking relationship with Creation, Creator, and fellow humans. (Gen. 3). God's response was to limit the potential for evil to spread by removing human access to the Tree of Life and expelling them from Eden, enacting discipline in the form of harder childbirth for women and sweat and toil for humankind when they worked the earth (chaos, entropy, disease, disorder). However, God also acted in a remedial fashion, first in providing clothing for cover and giving the promise of a Savior (Gen. 3:15).

The next time we encounter God giving a blessing for fruitfulness is in Gen. 9:7 after God destroyed all but the family of Noah and the animals on the ark. After disembarking from the Ark, Noah built an altar and made a burnt sacrifice to God. God was pleased and gave a covenant never to destroy the world by flood again. (Gen. 8:20-22). God again commanded fruitfulness, named animals as a food source for humans (which differs from Eden, where plants were the only named food source), put the fear of humans into the beasts of the earth, and established a call for capital punishment for murder. (Gen. 9:1-10). This blessing for fruitfulness focused on peopling the earth but did not explicitly direct humans in holy living, nor salvific agency. This situation changed with Abraham. We meet Abram in Gen. 12 when God called Abram to leave his home country and travel to a place God will show him. God then promised 1) to make Abram father of a great nation (Gen. 12:2), 2) to bless Abram and make him famous, (Gen. 12:2), 3) to make Abram a blessing to others, (Gen. 12:2), 4) to bless those who bless him and curse those who curse him, (Gen. 12:3), and 5) to bless all the families of the earth through him. (Gen. 12:3).

Abram's call and God's promise of blessing began the partnership and cooperative agency of God creating a people to prepare the way for the promised savior. The blessing of God promised and called for a proper relationship with God and for fruitfulness as a covenant people were propagated. Soteriologically, this is the watershed moment where God began gathering to Himself a special people who served as exemplars, prophets, priests, and teachers to bring the knowledge of God to the world. The story arc took time and goes through many trials and tribulations and God making promises and giving blessings to Abram and others until we come to Ex. 3 when God met with Moses in the burning bush.

God called and commissioned Moses and sent him to lead the now considerable Israelite population out of slavery to the freedom of a land flowing with milk and honey; a land of fruit and abundance – a blessed land for a blessed people. (Ex. 3:8). “As an image of abundance and divine blessing, fruit is conspicuously present in descriptions of the superiority of the Promised Land.” (Ryken 310). Through Moses, God established a new covenant, (Ex. 19:5-6), gave the Law, (Ex. 20), the priesthood, (Ex. 40:15), and the Tabernacle (Ex. 25-27) so that the people of Israel could more accurately serve God and instruct the world. If they adhered to the terms of the covenant they were promised great blessings, (Ex. 19:5-6) but if they violated the terms of the covenant, then curses would be the result (Deut. 11:26-28). Deut. 28 expounds on these blessings and curses. However, the principle is that God's blessings, prosperity, and shalom hinge upon the people of God being rightly related to God and to their neighbors. Failure in this matter will result in societal decay and destruction. This sad truth will be played out in great dramatic detail through the remainder of the Old Testament and punctuated most greatly

by the fall of Jerusalem and the deportation to Babylon. (Jer. 52). Even in this time of exile, God, despite having to act in discipline, also holds forth a remedial hope. That hope is recounted in many of the oracles of the Old Testament prophets. After seventy years in captivity, God brought His people back to their homeland purged of their dalliances with idolatry (Jer. 29:10). Micah looks forward to a time in the 'latter days' when God would restore and, "The theme changes abruptly again to one of salvation." (Mark J. Boda 548). Micah 4:4 states, "[e]veryone will live in peace and prosperity, enjoying their own grapevines and fig trees, for there will be nothing to fear. The LORD of Heaven's Armies has made this promise!" (NLT). In times of judgment, God still points to fruitfulness for a people who will be restored to His purposes.

During all this turmoil and upheaval, God inspired the prophets to imagine for the people a coming king in the lineage of Israel's greatest king, David. The aforementioned king would be more than a leader, greater than a prophet and holier than a priest, but also a king who would be greatly misunderstood. (Zech. 9:9-17) (Isa. 9:1-7) (Mal. 3:1). This messiah would be the kinsman-redeemer (Lev. 27:9-10) (Lev. 25:47-55) (Ruth 3:9) who would liberate the true Israel of God from a slavery greater than that of Egypt. He would be the one who would crush the head of Eden's serpent, (Gen. 3:15) but would also be cruelly wounded and suffer an atoning death. (Isa. 53); all of which would only make sense after it came to pass. Jesus Christ would create a new people of God, constitute a new order of humanity, and establish a new covenant community, the Church. The principles of fruitfulness and faithfulness would still hold. "Not counting three dozen occurrences of fruitful, the word fruit appears more than two hundred times in English translations. Three main meanings are discernable: (1) fruit in the modern sense of a

specific food group, linked especially with fruit trees; (2) the edible product of any tree or plant; (3) by metaphoric extension, the result of an action, including offspring as the result of sexual relations.” (Ryken 310).

New Testament (Gospels)

Jesus Christ, Son of God, savior of mankind, rightly rules center-stage in the New Testament and particularly the Gospels. Jesus, from the beginnings of His ministry, began to draw unto Himself disciples. (Matt. 4:18-22). He traveled to teach, heal, and train. Jesus primarily restricted His ministry to the covenant people of Israel, (Matt. 15:24) seeking first to reach them, for, of all persons on earth, they should have been best trained to recognize and receive Him. Having received Him, they could continue God’s program of partnering with Israel to teach righteousness to the nations. “Yet, He came to His own and His own knew Him not.” (John 1:11-13 NLT).

11 He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. 12 But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. 13 They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

Jesus was out not just to gather people but to make a brand new kind of person restored to the principles of God’s ideal as found in Genesis. Jesus came to create a whole new way of partnering with humans. Divine indwelling was the new nature of partnership Jesus ushered in.

“I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn’t produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. 3 You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.

5 Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in

them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. 6 Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. 7 But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! 8 When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.

9 I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. 10 When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love. 11 I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! 12 This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. 13 There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. 16 You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. 17 This is my command: Love each other." (John 15:1-17 NLT).

This discourse by Jesus serves as the central theological thesis of the dissertation subject of restoring declining churches. Persons and churches must abide in the Vine that is Christ. "According to Gen. 9:20, Noah was the first person to cultivate the vine after the Flood. At the personal level, every Jew wanted to have his own vine." (Ralph Gower 103). Even with Noah, the fruit of the vine was a powerful symbol of settling into the blessing of God. Unfortunately, he abused it, got drunk, and was disgraced.

The vine was of great importance in the religion of Israel. It was used as a symbol of the religious life of Israel itself, and a carving of a bunch of grapes often adorned the front exterior of the synagogue. The symbolism was based upon passages such as Psalm 80 and Isaiah 5:1-5 where God is Israel's vine. The vine was also important because it brought out teaching about right and wrong usage. (Gower 111).

Jesus expects that His people will be fruitful, and, as determined from other texts this means dissemination of teaching, incorporation or population of new adherents, and settling into the blessing of God and making our home in Him. From the context of this teaching, we see clearly explicated requirements for fruitfulness. Bearing fruit is

expected. It is also apparent that departing from Jesus' teaching will eventually sever the relationship and stop fruit production even being subject to 'awful punishments due to apostates'. (Craig S. Keener 301). "However, Jesus did not stop with this image, but went on to use the picture of 'the friend.'" These two pictures of the believer—branches and friends—reveal both our privileges and our responsibilities. As branches we have the privilege of sharing His life, and the responsibility of abiding. As friends we have the privilege of knowing His will, and the responsibility of obeying." (*Bible Exposition Commentary*, John 13-21).

The source of fruitfulness is Christ himself, so it is difficult to conceive of a church that is abiding in obedience and fellowship with Christ and failing to be fruitful. A fruitful church will necessarily be an obedient and loving church. A fruitful church will also be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit regarding programs and policies of the church that need to be pruned to make way for greater fruitfulness. However, many declining churches would contend that they are faithful to Christ despite evidence to the contrary. The purpose here is not to judge but to discern, and we are wise to remember that there are seasons when fruit takes time to become evident. Jesus even gave a parable of a man with an unfruitful tree.

6 Then Jesus told this story: 'A man planted a fig tree in his garden and came again and again to see if there was any fruit on it, but he was always disappointed. 7 Finally, he said to his gardener, 'I've waited three years, and there hasn't been a single fig! Cut it down. It's just taking up space in the garden.' 8 'The gardener answered, 'Sir, give it one more chance. Leave it another year, and I'll give it special attention and plenty of fertilizer. 9 If we get figs next year, fine. If not, then you can cut it down.' (Luke 13:6-9 NLT).

The image of the vine is thus almost always associated with the contrast between God's ideal for his people and their falling short of it. With such associations attaching to this image, Jesus' claim to be the "true" vine is very dramatic. This image, as with all of the symbols in John, is used for the 'exploration of Jesus'

identity and the responses to him' (Culpepper). Jesus is the "real" vine, the vine that is the fullness of that which is only partial or even false in other vines. Jesus, the completely obedient Son, embodies what Israel was meant to be. (*Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Fruit of Vine, electronic)

In this parable, we see a couple of things. Firstly, Jesus alluded to the lack of fruit from Judaism noting that its days are numbered; but secondly, to an abiding principle that God expects fruitfulness and when it is not present for long enough, death or dispersion may be the likely result. "That some fig trees do not bear fruit in a given year did not mean that they would never do so; in this parable the vineyard worker asks the master to make sure it was a worthless tree." (Keener 227). With work it is possible to revitalize the tree for fruitfulness as attested to in Luke 13:6-9 and throughout John 15:1-17. Jesus even says that His Father prunes away the unfruitful so that the fruitful can be even more fruitful, but even the fruitful are pruned to improve productivity. (John 15:1-2). Jesus' statement may mean that some declining congregations need to be closed so that other churches can serve better. Certainly, some dying churches merge or sell their buildings and give their assets to church plants to leave a healthy legacy and help the cause of Christ in the world. However, some other churches, whether intentional or not, fail to obey Christ and be fruitful and resist pruning for the good of the Kingdom. Other churches have the potential to seek Christ anew and reorient their mission and vision so as to abide in Christ, serve Christ, and bear much fruit once again. It actually comes down to whom a church really loves; does it love Christ or itself more? Any and all parts of Christianity will never be fruitful unless Christ is all in all; unless He is the vine and we serve the vine by being the branches. A healthy branch yields fruit; a dead branch yields kindling because unhealthy or dead things bear poor to no fruit.

Jesus gave the Church a mighty mandate when He uttered the Great Commission.

18 Jesus came and told his disciples, ‘I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. 19 Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. 20 Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ (Matthew 28:18-20 NLT).

Jesus explains that based on His authority and power, His people, His disciples, and His Church are to spread throughout the world, teach anyone who will listen to the true way of life Jesus offers, and initiate them through baptism (which possibly includes or at least implies conversion) in the name of the Trinity. “In the clearest possible language Christ expresses His intention of founding a universal religion.” (*The One Volume Bible Commentary*, electronic, Matt. 28:18-20).

Jesus’ blessing and command is unique insofar as the way to fruitfulness is not in multiplication first but in dispersion, as into fields for harvest and then reaping fruitfulness as people are reclaimed by God and made into God’s new kind of human. Jesus has redefined the means for fruitfulness. He has created the ‘called out of God’ – the Church.

Church Age (Acts to Present Day)

The age of the Church began with a great rushing wind as the Holy Spirit was poured out in Jerusalem upon the disciples and the crowds in the second chapter of Acts. Peter preached, but it is the Spirit of God that did the transforming. There were signs and wonders, but there was also tremendous fruit. Thousands converted in short order to the way of faith based upon the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Nazarene. This new population experienced amazing change and their fellowship and sharing indicated a total reorientation away from materialism to full community. (Acts 2:45-47). The Holy Spirit added daily to their number, the passage declares. However, we may also infer that the

new converts were abuzz and shared the word of their testimony among their neighbors. Certainly, the original disciples were praying, preaching, teaching, and sharing, so while the fruit is the result of the Holy Spirit, it was wrought in partnership with human agency. Surely, being attuned to the Spirit is a key to church health and fruitfulness even if it might not be happening on such a spectacular scale as witnessed in the book of Acts. The inherent principle is that the Church has but one source for life, health, and fruitfulness – God Almighty. It is through faith in Jesus Christ that the Holy Spirit moves to bear fruit to the glory of God the Father as seen in John 15:1-17. Apart from the power of God, the Church is just an institution. Apart from the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church (local or universal) is just a human cultural artifact. All merely human institutions eventually fall into disfavor and fade from the spotlight of history. We may take confidence that God will not allow the Church universal to totally fail; however, we have seen that a local branch can fail and will be pruned and discarded. A church does not have to fail!

After a bit of time elapsed in Acts, the new Church was largely a localized phenomenon centralized in Jerusalem. They were the called out of God, but they were not yet living out their ‘sent out’ or apostolic mission. This, however, was not the will of God, so through the evil actions of those opposed to the faith, the Christians in Jerusalem were dispersed because of persecution. (Acts 8:1). Regardless of the cause of the spur to spread out, the Holy Spirit used it to get the message of faith out of Jerusalem and into other parts of the world. In what was one of the greatest masterstrokes, God turned the chief oppressor, Paul, into a missionary to the Gentiles. (Acts 9). The Holy Spirit even helped overturn Jewish prejudice against Gentiles by communicating to and through Peter that God desired to save all people. (Acts 10). As the word spread and disciples

were made, churches were organized in homes in various population centers. (Rom. 16:5). The Holy Spirit directed the order and leadership of the churches through spiritual gifts and spiritual offices. (Eph. 4:11-13). Therefore, it seems logical to conclude that church leadership must be formed, informed, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor. 12). No doubt there was training, for that is the purpose of discipleship, but there was always a keen reliance on the Holy Spirit for the life and power of the churches. “In Galatians 5:22-23 Paul employed the image of the “fruit of the Spirit” to describe the workings of God’s Spirit in contrast to the “works of the flesh” (Gal. 5:17-21).” (Ryken 311).

Paul's introduction of the word fruit is filled with meaning. While we might have expected him to say, ‘The works of the Spirit are,’ Paul needed to use a fresh term. He had used ‘works’ enough throughout this letter. Besides, ‘works’ indicates lots of activities that people must do. ‘Fruit,’ however, is singular, indicating that all the fruits exist as a unit (like a bunch of grapes rather than many different pieces of fruit) and that all are important to all believers (unlike ‘gifts’ that are dispensed differently to different people). So Paul conveyed the meaning of a full harvest of virtues. Also, ‘fruit’ is a by-product; it takes time to grow and requires care and cultivation. The Spirit produces the fruit; our job is to get in tune with the Spirit. Believers exhibit the fruit of the Spirit, not because they work at it, but simply because they are filled with the Holy Spirit. (Life Application Bible Commentary, Gal. 5:17-23, electronic)

Today’s churches need to remember that without the Holy Spirit and without abiding in Christ, church leaders are just trained professionals or religious functionaries. Kris Kandiah writes, “The pastor’s work [weekly] reflects the way many churches prioritize their ministries. His church is doctrinally sound, reflecting apostolic teaching. But because it has isolated itself, it is failing in one important sense to live out the apostolic mandate. The surrounding community wouldn’t notice if that church ceased to exist, beyond the fact that more neighborhood parking would be available.” (49).

Leadership that is not in and from the Holy Spirit will not yield true, good, and lasting fruit. Sometimes declining churches look to mend their problems by implementing new techniques, tricks if you will, and while new approaches may be helpful, if technique supplants reliance upon the Holy Spirit, any fruit is not likely to last. This is not to say that there cannot be counterfeit fruit, for even in the New Testament false teachers and leaders began to emerge and gather large followings. No small measure of the General Epistles is devoted to refutation of those false teachings. The greatest barometer for God's view of church faithfulness is given to us in Rev. 2 and 3 in the form of the letters to the seven churches. "Each letter is addressed to the 'angel,' or 'messenger' (pastors?) of the church. Each message identifies Jesus in a special way, reveals an intimate knowledge of the church addressed, pinpoints the church's most serious flaw, and then conveys a command intended to correct the problem or warn the church. The letter closes with a promise of reward to the victor who responds obediently." (*Bible Reader's Companion*, electronic.)

In each address to each church, Jesus was envisioned speaking to that church commending the good that some of them did and condemning the evil. Ephesus was told that they didn't love properly as they did at first and if they did not return to their first love their church will be closed. (Rev. 2:4-5). Smyrna received no condemnation, but rather was encouraged to stand firm in the persecution it would face. (Rev. 2:8-11). Pergamum tolerated false prophets and was urged to repent lest Jesus make war upon them. (Rev. 2:12-17). Thyatira also had a problem with false teaching and faced suffering if it did not repent. (Rev. 2:18-29). Sardis was declared a dead church and told to wake up and strengthen itself because its deeds were not right in God's sight. (Rev. 3:1-6).

Philadelphia, despite having little strength, obeyed God and persevered, and would be protected. (Rev.3:7-13). It is possible that many declining and dying churches imagine themselves to be like Philadelphia while the truth may not be as they perceive it and their decline could be due to irreverence, disobedience, tolerance of false teaching, a lack of love, and/or they are luke-warm with apathy like Laodicea. (Rev. 3:14-22). Chapter 3:20 envisions Jesus knocking at the door of a church ready to come in and help them be restored, but will they open and comply?

Theological Study of Sources of Health and Barriers to Growth

The survey of the Canon of Scripture undertaken above has identified that God has had a redemptive agenda throughout human history and has used partnerships with persons and peoples to prepare the way for the Messiah, Jesus Christ. With Jesus, God enacts, in spite of human disobedience and evil, the actual effective means of redemption through Jesus' atoning death. Jesus trained disciples for a mission subsequent to the Resurrection event which, when empowered by the Holy Spirit, would give birth to the Church. The Church was designed to be the new community of God that was to gather in the harvest of the fruits of God's redemptive work in the world. The Church was a first-fruits evidence of God's ultimate redemptive stroke which will come when Jesus returns from Heaven and establishes the complete redemption and/or purging of all things.

Key features of Christian eschatology may be summarized as follows. Jesus, in inaugurating God's kingdom, has revealed God's intentions to the world. These include forgiveness of sins (Lk. 7:48-50), the conquest of evil, suffering, and death (Mt. 12:28-29; Lk. 4:18-21; Mt. 11:5; Jn. 11), the bringing of a new order of things which overturns common assumptions about power in society and the value of people (Lk. 6:20 ff.'13:30). But while there is real evidence of the kingdom's power at work in individual lives and in the creation of a community embodying such goals and values, the kingdom's coming remains incomplete.

We await the final day when God's intentions revealed in Jesus will be triumphantly fulfilled.

The 'final day' is commonly called in the New Testament the parousia of Christ (I Cor. 15:23; 1 Thes. 4:15). The word means 'presence' or 'arrival', and was used of visits of gods and rulers. This parousia may be called the 'second coming' of Jesus (cf. Heb. 9:28) and may be described as 'personal', since it is the revelation and vindication of Jesus of Nazareth. (Acts 1:11)." (Sinclair B. Ferguson 230).

The mission of the Church is to abide in Christ, rely upon the Holy Spirit, obey and teach the Word of God, and be the exemplary eschatological semiotic community that signals the dreams and wonders of the parousia.

Thus, a church that is healthy and fruitful will be so because it is faithful to God's Word, in partnership with and obeying the will of God as directed and empowered through the Holy Spirit while abiding in Christ and producing fruit through acts of love and witness. (Gene Wood 26-27). A church cannot be healthy if it is in discord, if it is serving a different gospel, a different master, or a different mission than the one Christ has established. (Gal. 1:6-9.) A church will be healthy so long as it is abiding in Christ, submitting to pruning, and willing to sacrifice to spread the good news of Jesus Christ. However, there are some key ways a church may die. "Many churches are characterized by an inward, self-serving focus, territorialism, control, passivity, disillusionment, lack of a clearly defined purpose, and lack of vision, all accompanied by division and conflict. The consequence of such attitudes and actions is a mass of churches that are plateaued or declining in membership, attendance, and vitality." (Gordon E. Penfold 178).

Hamartiology: Sin

"Scripture employs a variety of words to speak of sin, with meanings ranging from 'missing of a mark or goal' or 'the breach of relationship' to 'ungodliness',

‘perversion’ or ‘rebellion’. The common theme of every biblical expression of the nature of sin is the central idea that sin is a state of our being that separates us from the holy God; biblically, sin is ultimately sin against God.” (Ferguson 641). Churches that are declining and dying should take a careful spiritual inventory paired with prayer and fasting to discern whether they are choosing somehow to disobey God or whether they are failing by omission to live up to Christ’s standards. Sin has ruined things as shown all throughout Scripture: The Fall, (Gen. 3) the Golden Calf, (Ex. 32) Achan, (Josh. 7) various judges and kings in the OT; the examples are legion. Sinful anger kept Moses out of the Promised Land. (Num. 20:12). Sin is serious business and it is sin that will most quickly stop us from abiding in Christ; it will cause us individually and as a church to be cut off and cast out. Grumbling, complaining, fighting, false teaching, selfishness, and failing to love within the life of a church are all sources of morbidity which only repentance and grace can cure. Churches that are in serious decades long decline should not too quickly dismiss the question of whether and where there is sin at work in the cause of their decline.

Disobedience

Some might argue that disobedience has already been covered under the the broader heading of sin, but disobedience is such a powerful problem that it needs its own heading. Disobedience was the archetypal human sin, (Gen. 3) following hard on the heels of hubris when Eve and Adam took counsel from the Serpent instead of from God. Disobedience is here defined as a willful, knowing intention not to do something that God has commended or commanded or to do something contrary to those commands. Such an act is outright defiance. It is to abiding in Christ as a fetus cutting its umbilicus

away from its mother before being fully formed. Disobedience severs the person and the church from spiritual power. And since all church health, growth, and fruitfulness are ipso facto the produce of God in action, no church can have real fruit that lasts -- that stands up on the day of judgment -- unless it is nourished by the Holy Spirit. A dying or declining church should pray and ask God to reveal and convict them of any past or present willful disobedience. (Thom S. Rainer *Autopsy*, 43). Did they abuse a pastor? (Rainer 60). Did they discriminate and keep someone from Christ because of mere human categories of preference? (Rainer 44). Did they refuse to be biblically generous in all things? (Rainer 32-34). Did they fight and split over something that grieved the heart of God? (Rainer 48-49). Did someone hurt them and they sinned in carrying a grudge? Disobedience needs a course correction and a grace infusion or the church is dead whether or not it continues to meet.

Inaction

To take no action is in fact an action. Inaction includes the good that we know we should do but do it not. Inaction is ignoring an opportunity to obey God. Inaction includes the failure to plan or implement anything but the status quo. (Rainer 73-74). Inaction is a deadly serious sin because it can become so downright comfortable. Inaction is to the church the comforting warm waters of a pot atop a blazing fire in which swims the proverbial clueless frog. A church that is in decline or dying should be careful to assess where it has been lulled into inaction because, perhaps, things seemed too hard or too costly for it. "If congregations are born from a spark of creative interaction between faith and context, can leaders rekindle such a spark later in the church's life? My answer is, 'Yes, sometimes they can,' because I have seen it happen. But it certainly

isn't an easy process, especially after a long period of decline." (Alice Mann 37). No matter how hard turnaround may be, the fact remains that every church in every location is supposed to be on a mission for God. Inaction is the opposite of missional. "Disciples have three respective duties: to remain (abide), to love each other, and to testify." (The Bible Knowledge Commentary, John 15:1-15 electronic). "Faithfulness and fruitfulness are more Biblical measures for church health, not church size." (Ed Stetzer, *Outreach* July/Aug 2013).

Jesus referenced the fruits of inaction in His address to the Laodicean church. It was a church that thought it had all it needed but was, in fact, 'wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked'. In Rev. 3:19, Jesus counseled, "I am the one who disciplines everyone I love. Be diligent and turn from your indifference." Inaction is the barren fruit of indifference.

Self-orientation

A selfish church is a church consuming itself on a desert island – eating a finger here or a toe there in order to stay alive. A selfish church is auto-cannibalistic. This self-oriented vice has much to do with people who, despite hearing the gospel, still serve themselves and their desires, preferences, and comforts. (Rainer 52). Such selfishness renders a church blind and deaf to the movements of God. Self-orientation may well be one of the chief causes of decline in American churches. The core cause of this malady may be the result of having been shaped in a materialistic consumerist culture where we were taught to seek after our own desires. Hedonism robs a church of true passion and replaces it with nostalgia, inflated emotion, manufactured relevance, myopic mission, and

comforting platitudes. Thom Rainer writes, “[b]ut more than any one item, these dying churches focused on their own needs instead of others. They looked inwardly instead of outwardly. Their highest priorities were the way they’ve always done it, and that which made them the most comfortable.” (Rainer 22). A selfish church is an idolatrous church and that God will not and cannot bless! Selfish churches may grow in number because they learn to market to other selfish people and invite them into their selfish club that never seeks to lead them into truth but rather seeks to make mindless little consumers from them. (Rainer 49-50). This kind of sin in a church is very hard to cure. In many cases, only the death of the church will stop its decline. A selfish church needs to repent, it needs to be disciplined, and it needs to learn how to take up its cross and follow Jesus! (Rainer 87-89).

Pneumatology: Lack of Abiding and Spiritual Power

We must never forget that, “[s]ome church growth concepts literally stay on the surface by only studying the fruit, while overlooking the roots which produce the fruit.” (Christian Schwarz 9). As has already been noted, the presence and power of the Holy Spirit are absolutely essential to a church being vital. Scripture makes it clear that it is possible to grieve the Holy Spirit. (Eph. 4:30). In Eph. chapter four, Paul was primarily addressing the church at Ephesus as a whole; the teachings have both corporate and individual application. Paul clearly indicates the kind of things a church needs to do in order to be Spirit-powered and Christ-centered. He calls for humility, gentleness, making allowance for other’s faults, being patient, seeking peace, and being unified by the fact that there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father. (Eph. 4:1-6). Then he explains spiritual gifts, spiritual roles, and the way they work together in the

church to build up the body “making it healthy, growing, and full of love.” (Eph. 4:7-16). The last part of chapter four is spent explaining and contrasting worldly behavior versus Christian living. Paul concludes this section of the text with the warning not to grieve the Holy Spirit. Surely, it is possible that churches become lax in enforcing accountability (Matt. 18) and tolerate gross sin in the life of the church, both corporately and in individuals. This is, of course, unwise and unloving and depletes the church of spiritual power and authenticity. Could it be that churches that never enforce church discipline are by that disobedience grieving the Holy Spirit, harming the congregants, and failing to really live as Christ’s body? (Phil Stevenson 202-205). It seems likely that this is sometimes the case. Are there churches who, like Samson after his haircut, “wist not that the Lord had departed from him”? (Judges 16:20 KJV).

No person and no church can abide in the power of Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit if it is deficient in prayer. “Prayer is not only a channel for personal and corporate renewal, it also contributes significantly to conceptual and missiological renewal.” (Ron Crandall 48). Churches need a vibrant prayer life.

As the Apostle Paul has made plain, no church can be the church of the living Christ without the presence, power, grace, and giftings of the Holy Spirit. Such a church will be weak, blind, bitter, and captive to the power of the enemies of its soul.

Ecclesiology: Leadership

Continuing to abide in Christ and relying on the Holy Spirit should be the key focus of church leadership. An abiding focus requires far more participation than just that of the pastor, for especially in small, rural declining churches, decision-making

power is frequently held in unofficial and dysfunctional places. (Rainer, 56-57). Every member of a church should require of the rest of the church that it be accountable for obedience to God's Word, living in imitation of Christ, and dependent upon the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Many church-goers do not know nor understand how greatly they need this. (Crandall 60-61). "Leadership and vision are major keys to any type of turnaround in churches." (Stetzer, *Comeback Churches* 34). Without committed leaders to urge it to God's truth and implement a vision for discipleship and ministry action, the congregation will happily drift in many good but not excellent directions, lulled to complacency by sentimentality devoid of spiritual power. (Stevenson 202-205). "Leadership IS resisting the urge to settle." (Shannon O'Dell 88). In Ephesians four, the Holy Spirit gave churches leaders that were gifted by God for the job, but those leaders have to continue in the Spirit and the church has to obey the will of the Spirit. In the case of declining congregations, it may have been many years since anyone had truly been anchored in and empowered by the Holy Spirit functionally for missional leadership; (John Laster 12-13). that they may have gone through the motions, even preached on the subject, and certainly believed in the possibility. In practice, the counsel they relied upon was human ingenuity, human ability, and common sense. "Fulfilling the apostolic mandate is not something we can do on our own. Only by encountering the risen Christ and receiving the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit are we able to step beyond our doors and carry out God's mission. When we do so, we are transformed from an agoraphobic church to an apostolic church." (Kris Kandiah, 49). When we don't operate out of the power of God, we serve all the failings inherent in merely human methods and techniques. This false pragmatism is often the counterfeit that a declining church has

capitulated to follow because it has long failed to see that “Ichabod” -- the glory had departed. (1 Sam. 4:21). It is unlikely that many churches knowingly settled in empty motions devoid of glory but the sad effect remains. Before a church can be revived and before declining momentum reversed, the leadership of that church must, through prayer, fasting, discernment, repentance, and costly obedience, seek a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit. “The challenges and opportunities in our congregations are too crucial to tolerate unspiritual or inadequate leaders.” (John E. Laster 14). Leaders must do the things the Spirit calls upon them to do. Hard things, costly things, risky things but obedient, faith-requiring things – these are the fruits of leadership in surrender to the Holy Spirit!

Wrong Vision/No Vision

If leaders of declining churches fail to depend on the Holy Spirit and govern by political form and pragmatism, it is not surprising that such declining churches are often misdirected as to the purposes of God. Statistically, declining churches have few to no conversions. (Arthur T. Roxby III 13). Given Christ’s mandate in the Great Commission, few to no conversions is a serious problem that indicates many ills but chief among them is that the church is aiming for the wrong things. (Roxby 13). Perhaps that church is serving the status quo, or preserving an expression of church that conforms to the preferences of a bygone age, or perhaps it is indeed a cloister of inwardly-focused members.

Why don’t more pastors take steps to bring change within their congregations? Frankly, a significant number of church leaders are content with the status quo. You hear comments such as: ‘This is all I can handle.’ ‘Winning the lost is God’s business not man’s.’ ‘We are a teaching church.’ ‘We don’t want to proselytize.’ ‘This is a small community and everyone already has a church home.’ ‘The mega-church down the street draws the crowds. We cannot compete.’ ‘We are landlocked. Our facility will not accommodate more people than we have now.’

(Wood 151).

The problem is that many declining churches are on the wrong mission or they have no effective vision. (Roxby 88). While churches may spend months generating mission statements and vision statements, the bottom line is that Christ established the purpose of the church long ago and His mission and vision remain. When the Great Commission is the focus of the church and the church desires to please God, preach Christ, and go forth in the power of the Spirit, then it should be axiomatic that such a church will seek conversions, work to teach the faith in meaningful discipleship, and involve and engage its members in mission that matters both in justice and in gospel. (Roxby 77). Many small declining churches do a lot for missions through their giving, but fail to make much of difference where they are. (Wood 63). This, too, is a misdirected or wrong vision. The cure is as Jesus told the church in Ephesus in Revelation 2, 'go and do your first works again'. The church at Ephesus that Paul wrote and trained was, shortly thereafter, in need of redirection back to its proper mission of love.

Missional Drift

The next barrier to growth and health is missional drift which is the tendency of organizations to begin to confuse the proper mission from certain aspects of its implementation. "A healthy church is focused on its ministry. Too many churches are attempting to be everything to everybody, and they wonder why they fail to ever accomplish anything of significance." (Dennis Bickers 33). Some structures begin taking precedence over results. Some outcomes become more preferential than those defined by the proper mission. Some strategies, approaches, or methods become enshrined in a

hallowed tradition that served the purpose for a time, but now the purpose is to serve those methods. (Rainer 22). Missional drift is what happens when a church stops seeking to save the lost and make disciples and begins to exist for its own sake. In many seriously declining churches, the mission of the church becomes survival. (Rainer 22). Everything is done so the church can stay open and yet few stop to ask what the church is accomplishing for the kingdom of God. As Thom Rainer states, “[b]ut the deceased church, somewhere in its history, forgot to act upon the Great Commission. So they stopped going. And making disciples. And baptizing them. And teaching them.” (41). “The churches that are plateaued or declining have lost the passion for the Great Commission.” (Stevenson 200). The cure for missional drift is to return to the Great Commission and ruthlessly assess where the organization has stopped serving that goal because “[a] church without a gospel-centered purpose is no longer a church at all.” (Rainer 75). Restoring a church to its true mission is hard and painful, and few declining churches will want to make the sacrifices and tough decisions that such an inventory may ask of them. A church may discover that to best serve the gospel, the local church needs to surrender its assets to help plant new churches or merge with another church to make something that is on target and healthy. (Rainer 101).

Poor or No Discipleship

“Healthy churches emphasize disciple-making as a spiritual dynamic. Healthy disciple-making churches are both inwardly and outwardly focused.” (Waldo Werning 104). The matter of discipleship has been discussed prior to this, but it is important that it receive some special attention. Churches may delude themselves into thinking that because they do Bible studies or Sunday school classes they are doing discipleship.

“Many churches have learned to attract guests but have a hard time leading them to become committed disciples.” (Stetzer 117). After a fashion, they are doing some type of discipleship but is it good discipleship? Good discipleship replicates people who abide in Christ, go forth in the power of the Spirit, share the word of their testimony, and live in the world in ways that please and bring honor to God while building the kingdom through sacrificial and intentional ministry of gospel and justice. (Rick Warren 106). Making people into Bible scholars has some merit, but if those scholars never do what God has asked of them, there is a huge disconnect. This is poor discipleship. The other problem is no discipleship. People are brought into churches and taught little to nothing and their lives differ in no significant ways from those who do not worship God. This is the outcome of no discipleship. (Roxby 85). It may be that the lack of discipleship comes from a person’s own elective not to participate but here the church should lovingly encourage people of their absolute need of discipleship. (Stephen A. Maccia 59-60). It could also be the case that it has been so long since anyone in a SRDNELC church has experienced healthy and effective discipleship that no one has the training to actually offer it. Perhaps there is no one who feels they can make the time to either attend to it or to teach it. All of these things, in their effective denial of the Great Commission, assure a declining church of an accelerating spiral into closing its doors.

Too Few Workers

As a result of years of being off-mission, failing to enact healthy church discipline, offering good discipleship, misguided or misdirected leadership, sin of any kind, and the lack of spiritual power, many a small church finds itself crushed up against the wall of a pragmatism that declares there aren’t enough workers to do what it takes to

become a healthy, fruitful church. It is true that in a small declining church many people wear many hats, often a great number for which they are ill-qualified. They may be the only, even if only grudgingly, willing parties to do those jobs. (Bickers 9). No one wants to try anything because there will not be enough help to do it right. No one wants to suggest a new idea because they are already overburdened and do not want to get saddled with another responsibility. The sad reality is that a lot of the things that declining churches are doing are likely off-course and probably not even necessary. Having an endless number of committees is not useful for turning around a church. (William E. Ramsden 12). People need to be disciplined and engaged in real ministry. Unfortunately, many have mistaken serving on a committee as doing the ministry committees were created to make happen.

Small churches in decline often have a great problem attracting and paying clergy and sadly, the ones they get are asked to focus on the wrong things. They may want a chaplain who will give a devotional and coddle them in inwardly focused pastoral care. (Bickers 106). Little do they know that the pastoral care of members would be better served by church members, leaving the pastors the challenge of working on getting the church on the right mission and focusing on discipleship and ministry that produce converts. “Perhaps the greatest single weakness of the contemporary Christian Church is that millions of supposed members are not really involved at all, and, what is worse, do not think it strange that they are not.” (Bickers 129). New converts who are properly disciplined are the cure to a lack of workers.

Biblical/Theological Conclusion

The Church is Christ’s missionary agent in the world, but He has not left it alone.

The Holy Spirit was given so that individuals and local churches can be filled, led, invigorated, and challenged to carry out the mission of the Great Commission. The unique source of power for all the enterprises found in Christ's mandate is the abiding lifestyle. Individuals must abide in Christ in order for their local churches to abide. Disobedience, apathy, selfishness, missional drift, and poor leadership are actually fruits of failing to abide, failing to let God operate through them by the power of the Holy Spirit. Regardless of the era in which the Church finds itself, the foundation for effective and vital Church life and health remains the Chief Cornerstone – Jesus Christ. He alone is the true vine. The redemptive purposes of God are the Church's true mission. When the church abides, obeys, and relies upon the Holy Spirit, the fruits of growth and health come from God. God is and has been on a mission to save the universe and since God never fails, redemption will happen. Whether or not we will be partners with God in that redemption will hinge on our abiding in Christ.

Precedent Studies: Chronology of the Problem

For some time after the “golden days of the 1950's church”, churches, and therefore their parent denominations, have been afflicted with decline. (Michael Montgomery 24-26). Many have studied both the causes of decline and the possible solutions thereto. According to Michael Montgomery, studies were initiated long ago when the Federal Council of Churches did work on the problems of “The Church and Rural Life” at the end of the nineteenth century. Their study was begun because migration patterns had people relocating away from rural centers. In the 1950's, a program called “Town and Country” was initiated by the National Council of Churches to continue studies along these lines. The 60's and 70's saw the focus move toward

urban centers, yet small churches were not altogether forgotten. The Illinois Small Church Project was adopted to gather small membership church representation for listening sessions regarding the problems these churches faced. They attempted to respond to some of the issues by funding internships for seminarians and managed to produce some results not the least of which was better morale and enthusiasm in some local churches. Also in the 70's, some academic approaches emerged. One that came from "American management theory" applied its tools of analysis to churches. One of the key thinkers around that time, Lyle Schaller, contributed greatly to the understanding of church growth and health. Others, like David Ray, continued to work on helping small membership churches by taking the research of others and pairing it with personal pastoral experience in small churches. (Montgomery 24-26).

Literature on turnaround churches tends to fall into two categories. Some literature is written by researchers such as Barna, who have done extensive research in the field of turnaround ministry. Other literature is written by practitioners or pastors who have been successful in turnaround church ministry themselves. The danger is research based literature is that authors typically lack first-hand experience in turnaround ministry, so their writing tends to be more clinical and statistical rather than experiential. (Daniel Eymann dissertation 55).

In the 80's and 90's, focus on church growth tended to advantage larger churches and disempower very small ones who could not transplant the programs of these approaches into their setting. Estimates place a minimum of 130 worshippers being required to support a physical plant and a full time minister. (Montgomery 24). This is a great challenge to the very small and rural churches. Some assume the best solution is to close and/or merge smaller congregations. (Rainer 100-101). In some cases, the assets of these congregations would be cannibalized to fund the planting of new churches. There are occasional warrants for these actions, but Lyle Schaller has indicated that, in the case

of mergers, often the combined membership of the new church is less than the membership from the original churches totaled together prior to merger. “Denominations that promote mergers usually decline.” (Robert W. Holaday 19 citing Lyle Shaller, *The Small Church is Different* 74).

Many sought to “ignore” the small church as less relevant when the late 90’s and 2000’s turned to a much more intense focus on church planting. Demographic studies and “Boot Camps” were used in some quarters to selectively pair trained church planters with high population density urban areas most likely to generate success. To be certain, it is important to plant churches and it is wise to be strategic, but it is not necessarily appropriate to sideline the contribution and potential of small, rural congregations.

As Brandon O’Brien states, “[t]he real deficiency of small churches, then, is not that they lack resources or opportunity or the potential for impact. The central problem of the small church is perception: many pastors and congregants fail to see the unique and strategic advantages of their small membership church. Innovative small churches leading ministry innovation, by contrast have stopped viewing their size as a vulnerability and have embraced it as an asset.” (Outreach July/Aug 2013).

Perception plagues the small, rural, declining church, but it is not the only driver of their difficulties. According to Bickers,

Things learned about small churches:

1. Many suffer serious self-esteem issues. They can’t see themselves as churches God can significantly use.
2. Most of them lack any common vision except for survival. This often causes the church to plateau and eventually decline.
3. Some are very exclusive due to strong family ties that exist within the church. This can make it difficult for new people to feel welcome, and it limits the growth of the church. It can also mean that even the pastor will find it difficult to be accepted and unable to exercise any real leadership.
4. Resources are usually limited. Enough money comes in to pay the bills and other essentials, but there may not be enough to fund new programs or ministries. Interestingly enough, if an emergency arises within the church, the money always turns up to meet the emergency.
5. Too much is frequently expected of the pastor.

6. Leadership is in the hands of a few people who may or may not be spiritually qualified to exercise such leadership. Sometimes those leadership positions are protected by serious turf wars.” (9)

Bickers summary is an apt one. SRDNELC churches are usually affected by each of these issues to varying degrees. The focus upon perception needs to be turned upon each of these issues. Something in the way the church perceives itself, identifies itself, and values itself drives each of these matters. A change in perspective and understanding of the way things really are, versus the way the congregants and probably the pastors see themselves, is needed to effect transformation. Perception is a function of vision. Another way of stating this is to say that when people see things as they really are, then they are ready for a new vision of how things could, should, and would be better if they made certain changes. Andrew Haskins identifies one of the pressing causes of perspectival impoverishment of the small church. “The culture of the small church is predisposed to sentimentality rather than rationality, to habit rather than to a purpose.” (21). Kennon L. Callahan states that, “[a] congregation without a mission is a club, not a congregation.” (39). However, the perspectives of the struggling small, rural church have not been greatly helped by a lot of the literature and research that has been done. Pastors of small churches are often sent to small and rural churches being either, new to ministry and thereby inexperienced, or being second career pastors lacking much formal training, or being retired and seeking a “light work load”. (Bickers 106). None of these approaches is terribly likely to generate a true change agent or effect. Denominational approaches to fill these pulpits have likely worsened things instead of improving them. Other solutions are bi-vocational pastors who either work full-time and pastor in the time that remains to them or, in another form of bi-vocationalism, pastors are full-time but sent

to multiple churches. (Ramsden 12). The net result of either of these approaches is a fragmentation of focus and energy for the pastor and sometimes competition among the churches. It is likely rare that two or more partnering churches will cooperate to such an extent as to make a beneficial and vitality producing yoking.

Rick Warren states

The problem with many churches is that they begin with the wrong question. They ask, 'What will make our church grow?' This is a misunderstanding of the issue. It's like saying, 'How can we build a wave?' The question we need to ask instead is, 'What is keeping our church from growing? What barriers are blocking the waves God wants to send our way? What obstacles and hindrances are preventing growth from happening?' (Warren 15-16).

Rick Warren's Purpose Driven model was a tool that many churches looked to because its conceptual simplicity was easier to adopt than so many of the principles used in other large churches that shared their methodologies through books and seminars. Still, small, rural churches have a hurdle in their perception of themselves that can keep them from truly benefiting from a purpose driven model. All churches are already purpose driven, it is just that the purposes are somehow misaligned so as to yield the declining results that those churches are getting. Also, as noted by Roxby, "[t]he small church's survivalist mentality often engrains poor esteem into the congregation's collective psyche. Because of their small size, members fear that no one would be attracted to their fellowship." (Roxby 72). So when small, rural churches have poor self-esteem and inappropriate or ineffective purposes, they continue to struggle. These churches are struggling with "systems suffocation". (Stevenson 203). All churches have systems and they are necessary. When working properly they guide the mission and vision of the church toward health, but when the systems themselves become the mission, the church suffers. The church that lives to serve the system may ask itself what it should

do, but when it does, it does so to protect the system it serves. (Stevenson 203).

However, if the church were to ask instead, what would best serve the purposes of God, then perhaps they might be able to stop serving the system. (Stevenson 203). A great example of systematic suffocation comes from the great difficulty that small churches face when they try to fill all the positions required by their denominational polity. “The prescribed number of leadership positions that must be filled prohibits smaller churches from creating new ministries.” (Roxby 70)

Mary Jo Neitz discovered that the key issue in studying rural life was that “what worked in the past might or might not work today – but not because the social world is the same; for the key issue in studying rural life is the rapid and constant state of change in rural America.” (Montgomery 24 citing from a summary of the Missouri Rural Churches Project at: <http://hrr.hartsem.edu/reseachjrurlchrch.html> accessed July 28). Because the techniques of the past may or may not work, something more than technique is required for small, rural church turnaround. “Turnaround strategies are not necessarily transferrable.” (Eymann *Great Commission Research Journal* 152).

A systematic study of the causes and the cures that have worked is required. Following upon that, each local congregation needs to understand itself and its present and likely future context so that by faith, abiding in Christ, and working wisely it can realign its missional priorities with the enduring priorities of God and its unique position and potential contribution to their community. “Small, strong congregations share one excellent mission as their gift with the whole community. They live a theology of service, not a theology of survival.” (Callahan 38).

Leadership Foci

Because perspective, and therefore vision are key drivers of success or failure of a congregation, the element of leadership is a key factor in the history of a church.

(Matthew Pickering 69) (Roxby 52). Across the survey of literature, the call for good clergy leadership is nearly univocal. In contrast to good clergy leadership, some church leaders take a default position of refusing to take responsibility for decline in their churches. (Kenneth E. Priddy 163). Blame is diffused among community factors and congregational issues. Some point to new churches that are “robbing” their church of people but should instead query, “what their church is doing that is so compelling that no one would consider leaving.” (Priddy 164). Leadership and vision are entwined.

“Effective church turnaround stands on two cooperating platforms – Spiritual Renewal with Strategic Initiative. The tendency of most church leaders is to embrace one or the other in an attempt to revitalize a church, but either without the other is incomplete and insufficient.” (Priddy 162). Consistent leadership, strategy, vision, and implementation are necessary for church turnaround; therefore, consistency in the leadership of the church is vital. However, consistency has long been a problem for these struggling churches that they experience high pastoral turnover, short tenures, and different approaches with the arrival of each new pastor. (David Lewis Samelson, Abstract).

Samelson identifies the following concerning leadership: “[t]he 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.” (Abstract).

However, small, rural churches are unlikely to be trusting of clergy leadership for a few

years because they've been burned by the phenomenon of clergy passing through and on to bigger and better things all too often. The small, rural church survivalist mentality is not just about keeping the doors open, it is often about enduring the latest cleric.

(Samelson Abstract).

Most often a small, rural church awakens to its need for change is in moments of crisis. "The reality is many churches are in a panic. They feel alone, isolated, and inept to develop the necessary plan to repurpose for the Great Commission." (Stevenson 204-205). If such a church does awaken in a panic, they may be too far gone to do anything about it. (Rainer 93-94). Crisis awareness usually comes after the causes of decline have become institutionally ingrained. These churches have for years filled "leadership positions with unqualified or immature people." (Roxby 42). The church has long been hostage to a self-serving mentality because of a vacuum of proper vision. "What people of the church desire for their own benefit tends to affect the decision making process when the Lord's vision is absent." (Andrew M. Haskins 10). And, "resistance to change is a universal issue for everyone, including those in church leadership. People resist change even when it is in their best interest." (Jeffrey M. Dadisman 80). Further, "anyone in the small church has the power to put the brakes on any idea, if he or she complains loudly enough. Complaints are listened to because the goal of the church is not to move ahead, but to keep everyone happy." (Steve R. Bierly 42). Another key problem is that many clergy, due to their inexperience, come into a small, rural church setting and are conditioned by the congregation to misunderstand pastoral leadership. A pastor can be made to believe that his or her job is to maintain the current ministries of the church, shepherd it in its last days in a chaplain or hospice capacity, or that keeping

everyone happy is good ministry, thereby not recognizing that the church is in denial. (Mann 34-35). Powerful social forces within the small, rural congregation reinforce and reward pastors for accepting and accommodating these roles in these ways. The real tragedy of this conditioning is that such a pastor will likely carry this mode of pastoral service into future appointments and perpetuate them instead of being an agent for missional revitalization and turnaround. Senator Paul Simon of Illinois spoke at a rural ministry conference and stated, "If the mission of a congregation is to keep its doors open, it will fail. If the mission of the congregation is to do mission, then it will succeed." (Ray Branstiter 320). "A key to missional renewal in the small congregation is facilitating that congregation's focus outward to the community and the world around it." (Roxby 99). Evangelism is often a weak point for small, rural, declining congregations. "Church leaders have such a high degree of inertia in the area of evangelism they must commit at least forty percent of their energy to outreach before the church will experience a balanced return alongside other priorities." (Dadisman 77). But if they do, "a small church can have more impact in a small community than a large church has in a large community." (Dan Kimball *Outreach*, July/Aug 2013).

Interestingly, in their 1973 album, "Houses of the Holy," Led Zeppelin wrote a song entitled, "The Song Remains the Same." One of the lines from that song says, "Everything that's small has to grow. And it has to grow!" Unfortunately, for many small, rural churches, the song has remained the same, but Led Zeppelin has been proven inaccurate, for these small holy houses, in many cases, have barely maintained, or have seriously declined. The inwardly focused song continues to play as leaders come and leaders go, the mission is happiness of those already in the church, and the small, rural

church keeps playing its own dirge. It does not have to be that way!

Theorists/Theories and Practitioners/ Practices

Small, rural churches are here to stay, though many die every year. The majority of churches are small and many of them are rural. Ed Stetzer notes that there are, “Three questions that demonstrate when it is not okay for a church to stay small. 1) Is your church staying small even though the community around you is growing? 2) Is your church staying small because you refuse to engage the culture around you? 3) Is your church staying small because you love your fellowship but not the lost?” (*Outreach* July/Aug 2013). Somehow, many small churches find rationalizations that preclude them from asking and appropriately answering such important questions.

The problems of decline and the attempts to formulate a means of redress have been studied with many varieties of solutions produced as a result. George Edward Sloan has done an excellent job graphically representing the suggested solutions for revitalization according to authors that were current at the time of Sloan’s dissertation. He shares from Ken Hemphill, George Hunter, Stephen Macchia, John Matthison, Christian Schwarz, Peter Wagner, and Rick Warren. That table is reproduced below. (Table 2.1)

Characteristics of Church Health/Growth from Sloan Dissertation pages 55-56 .

Hemphill	Hunter	Macchia
Supernatural Power		Empowering Presence
Christ-exalting worship		God-exalting worship
God-connecting	Prayerful planning	Spiritual disciplines

prayer		
Servant leaders		Leadership development
Kingdom Family Relationships	Multiplying units as ports of entry	Loving and caring relationships
God sized vision		
Passion for the Lost	Identify and reach receptive people	Outward focus
Maturation of believers		Growing in community
		Administration and accountability
		Stewardship and generosity
	Indigenous forms of ministry	
	Reaching across social networks of believers	Networking with the body of Christ
	Ministering to felt needs	

Matthison	Schwarz	Wagner	Warren
Depend on God	Passionate Spirituality		
Exciting worship	Inspiring Worship	Celebration	Worship
		Biblical priorities	
Form a planning group	Empowering leadership	Dynamic pastoral leadership	
Develop staff	Loving relationships	Cells/small groups	Fellowship
Decide to grow			
Determine needs in the community	Need-oriented evangelism	Evangelism methods	Evangelism
	Holistic small groups	Congregation	Discipleship
Diagnose health	Functional structures		
Delegate ministry	Gift oriented ministry	Ministries for members	Ministry
Find strengths and weaknesses		Lay Ministry	

Define Priorities			

Figure 2.1 (Sloan, 55-56).

From Figure 2.1 we begin to see clusters of solutions. It is obvious that God plays a huge role by providing His power, presence, and grace. The church must make their prayer, worship, discipleship, leadership training, fellowship, outward and inward missions, evangelism, spiritual gift training and implementation, strategic leadership, and administration increase in excellence in order for revitalization to happen, take hold, and, most importantly, perpetuate.

Mirroring some of these turnaround principles, Priddy states, “[t]o experience church turnaround, commit to the disciplines of Preemptive Prayer, Basic Bible, Cost Commitment, and Missional Multiplication.” (176). He means that prayer precedes and leads all efforts, the Bible is clearly and consistently taught and reinforced, the church and the leaders have ‘counted the cost’ and are staying committed to the course they have set upon, and the missional work of the church is focused on gaining souls for the kingdom of God. Notice that the leadership cost, the congregational cost, and the economic cost are all part of the needed commitment. To properly count this cost, “We must ask “why” and “what” before we ask “how”. Why are we here as a congregation? Why has God called us to this place? What is God up to in our lives? Being clear about these things will help us think about the question of how.” (Randall Schlecht 321). Knowing “how” is ultimately going to inform decisions regarding cost commitment, but leadership without such discernment may falter at generating a compelling vision.

A standout name in the study of church renewal/revitalization is Dr. Thom Rainer. One of Rainer’s many great books, *Breakout Churches* is based on Jim Collins book,

Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't. In writing *Breakout Churches* Rainer borrowed from Collins' research and design models and came up with a structure for breakout churches; the problem with this model in regard to the SRDNELC churches is that many of them are not in good shape, thus much remedial work needs to be done before any of the breakout principles could even be considered. (Rainer, *Breakout Churches*).

Causes of Decline and Remedial Changes

In an article summarizing his Ph.D. dissertation, Daniel Eymann identified eleven causes of decline and eleven changes to address them. They are:

Decline:

1. Inadequate pastoral leadership
2. Loss of vision
3. A changing community (demographics)
4. An aging congregation
5. Inward focus (lack of outreach)
6. Resistance to change (traditionalism)
7. Power struggles (internal politics)
8. Church split (divisiveness)
9. Inadequate facilities
10. Spiritually unhealthy (no growth process)
11. Low morale (discouragement)

Changes:

1. Called new pastor
2. Renewed and recast vision
3. Targeted new demographic
4. Targeted younger age groups
5. Community outreach
6. Contemporary worship
7. Confronted/removed divisive people
8. Forgiveness and reconciliation
9. Remodeled or new facilities
10. Small groups (or growth initiatives)
11. Positive and encouraging atmosphere (Great Commission Research Journal, 148-149).

Notably, Eymann's list of changes focused on the strategic instead of the theological/philosophical like the list from Sloan's summary of Hemphill, Hunter, Macchia, Matthison, Schwarz, Wagner, and Warren. It may prove helpful to have dual categories overlapping the theological/philosophical models and tangible actions. However, the real genius of implementation lies in the specifics that must go into far greater particularity. However, the kind of particularity needed is rarely available in surveys of the literature and may in fact support the necessity of church growth and health mentors, coaches, and consultants who can help tailor the broad concepts into specific detailed interventions. (Gary L. McIntosh 7). McIntosh shares that, from his observations, two forces are required for effective turnaround. "The internal force is most often a pastor who desires to see a church reach a new level of vitality, while the external force is often a church consultant." (7). "The very unique nature of every church and the unique causes of that church's decline suggest that there are not simple answers, nor simple solutions to reverse decline. An intentional and multi-faceted approach is needed." (Eymann *Great Commission Research Journal*, 152).

Phil Stevenson has developed a useful way of categorizing a local church and its likelihood to change so as to revitalize.

Hospice: Indicators: no conversions, no baptisms in 12 months and an evangelism budget less than 1% of yearly budget.

Unhealthy: Indicators: conversions 5% of avg. weekend worship attendance. Believer's baptism 10-20% of reported conversions. Evangelism budget of 1-2% of total budget.

Healthy church: Indicators: conversions 8-10% of avg. weekend worship attendance, Believer's baptism 30-35% of reported conversions, and evangelism budget of 5% of total budget.

Fit Church: Indicators: conversions 10% of avg. weekend worship attendance,

Believer's baptisms 50% of reported conversions, evangelism budget 10% of total budget. (205-208).

A further means of classification is found in Stevenson's insights into the following church perspectives:

- "The adaptable – willing to make changes.
- The creditable – unwilling to change and are honest about it.
- The deniable – unwilling to change, but pretend they are.
- The unfeasible – cannot change
- The teachable – willing to change and want to know how." (209).

From the above classification, it can be demonstrated that a huge factor in turnaround is the attitude and atmosphere of the local church. It is unlikely that either a consultant or pastoral change agent will make much headway in a church that has no real desire to change. In another quote, Eymann states, "[a] positive atmosphere is crucial to turnaround and there are five particular aspects that top the list of ways to build such an atmosphere. There are positive leadership, celebrative worship, casual atmosphere, remodeled facilities, and a spirit of unity." (156-157). It is interesting that attitude frames Eymann's thinking. Addressing the aesthetic and emotive environment of a small, rural church is likely to raise morale, foster positive pride, and generate a new dawn of commitment from the congregation about the church. Done correctly, aesthetic and emotional improvements could go a long way toward stemming the inertial drag of poor congregational self-esteem. However, it is often easier to prescribe such a thing than to bring it to pass. Financial constraints are the most typical limiting factor either by lack thereof or by certain elements within the church tightening purse-strings to control outcomes. "The local church should not have to go on this journey of revitalization and change alone. Resources ought to be available in the denominations in which they participate." (Stevenson 199). "Multiple changes are required to turn a declining church

around.” (Eymann 151). Kent R. Hunter lists some elements needed for a healthy church, and many of them will impact the attitude of the church.

Healthy churches thrive by means of 1) minimal politics, which includes restructuring toward a more biblical leadership model with low control, high accountability. There is a culture of biblical correction that speaks the truth in love. Leadership is from the center of God’s will. 2) Minimal confusion. This requires a clearly articulated philosophy of ministry that centers around fulfilling the Great Commission. There must be lots of clear communication. 3) High morale is maintained by celebration, fun, and enjoyment. Worship has a 70% praise element. 4) High productivity. Everything in measured. There is a culture of biblical stewardship and discipleship multiplication. 5) Low Turnover of leaders. (230-232).

Jeff Keady identifies the kind of values a small church pastor must have to turn around the congregation, stating that, “1) Relationships are most important, 2) The ministries of [the] church should reflect the gifting of [the] people, 3) [The pastor] must speak the language of [the] community well, and 4) [The pastor] must thrive as the leader.” (Keady electronic). Further contributing to the picture of the clergy leader, David Rumbly adds: “The core of my research has found this truth: the leadership style of the senior pastor has direct impact on the effectiveness of the church.” (18). One of the key ways the senior pastor leads well is to “empower not only the staff but also the volunteers to create a synergy effect that builds up the body of Christ.” (Rumbly 19). In order to create such a synergy, Rumbly advises clergy to “lead yourself, lead others, create momentum through inspiration, enable input (team thinking), and manage with excellence (contingent reward and transactional leadership (plan/goal/measure)).” (25).

One of the most important conclusions we’ve drawn from our study of comeback churches is that they first had a spiritual experience that redirected and re-energized their lives, beginning with their leader. This spiritual experience gave them a vision of what could — and surely would — be. The vision provided a compelling focus, helping them develop practical and powerful plans. Spiritual

empowerment from their ongoing time with God allowed them to persevere in implementing their plans. (Stetzer *Comeback Churches*, 15).

Phil Stevenson has culled ten root causes of plateau and decline from the various literature sources, and many of these causes is deeply tied to leadership failure, blindness, or apathy.

1. Missional drift. Churches can easily drift from the biblical purpose of fulfilling the Great Commission to the institutional purpose of survival. Church leaders begin to neglect their communities, those disconnected from Christ, and people living in the margins. They measure effectiveness by the contentment of those in the pews. When in reality, they ought to “. . . constantly monitor its mission to bring the message of Jesus Christ to new generations and new cultures.”¹⁸ As this ceases to happen, the church begins to plateau.
2. Change resistant. Gene Wood in his book, *Leading Turnaround Churches*, observes, “A significant proportion of church leaders are content with the status quo.”¹⁹ Initiated change often results in conflict. People will often push back to new ideas, methods, and means of ministry. Change must take place for a church to move off its plateau, but few leaders want to negotiate the process needed to initiate and implement that change.
3. Leadership deprived. I served on staff with John Maxwell for six years. Over those six years John told us, constantly and consistently, everything rises and falls on leadership. A plateaued church needs a leader who is willing to show the way to the next level of effectiveness. “How can leaders expect their congregations to change if they themselves are unwilling to lead the way?”²⁰ A congregation deprived of leadership will quickly move from plateaued to declining.
4. Overly tolerate. Churches often tolerate sin, infighting, complacency, and disruptive activity out of a misguided sense of acceptance. Clinical psychologist Henry Cloud states, “It’s important for leaders to remember that they get what they tolerate.”²¹ The longer such is tolerated, the deeper the rift. The deeper the rift, the stronger the hold on the plateau.
5. Functional dysfunction. Much like families and individuals can learn to function with dysfunction, so can churches. Their dysfunction becomes their norm. It is their security. They know they are not what they can, or ought, to be, but they are comfortable. Many churches that say they desire to change really do not. This is evident when they are given the opportunity to make corrective changes. “Many churches never experience a comeback because they want the community to change while they remain the same.”²² The church becomes passive-aggressive. They agree with a

corporate nod but disagree with their actions.

6. Systems suffocation. Every church has systems in place. These systems guide the implementation of their mission and vision. Systems are needed. They play an important role. Yet when the system becomes the mission, the church suffocates. The system is a mere delivery method for mission. In many churches, the systems become their reason for existing. This results in protecting how the church does things (system), rather than why the church does things (mission). Systems suffocation spills over into the questions asked. “Churches that operate by asking, ‘What do you think we should do?’ end up in a different place than churches that ask, ‘What does God think we should do?’”²³ When a church asks itself what ought to be done, systems are protected. When a church inquires of God, it edges closer to the abyss of desperate faith.

7. Cloudy clarity. I attended a simulcast of the Leadership Summit. Author and speaker Marcus Buckingham, one of the presenters, stated, “One thing a leader must be is clear.” Clarity in mission and vision is critical for the continued effectiveness of a church. Over time the clarity of direction can become cloudy, confusing, and downright chaotic. “Church leaders cannot expect folks to charge into the chaos of system change if they continue to sound such an ambiguous call.”²⁴ Ambiguity (cloudiness) halts a church’s effectiveness. Lack of clarity freezes a congregation, or it wanders off in the wrong direction. Clarity results in congregational confidence.

8. Vision indifference. It has been said it is better to hate someone than to be indifferent. Hate has the potential to be turned into love, but indifference shuns any attempt at reversal. Why? The person simply does not care. An indifferent vision is the same for a church. A visionless church can be rekindled in its vision, yet a community of faith indifferent in its glimpse of a preferred future is on dangerous ground. “. . . An exciting vision brings emotional fuel for change.”²⁵ When this emotional fuel is nonexistent, very little can motivate a church off of its plateau.

9. Inward inertia. When I am sick, the majority of my focus is on me. I am not concerned about the health of others; it is all about me. “The focus of the church is on itself, on what it takes to succeed.”²⁶ This is the corporate attitude of plateaued churches. They are hurting so they focus inward. It is about them.

Unlike the majority of congregations that are either on a plateau or declining, effective congregations are healthy, growing, committed to reproduction, and open to changes that will move them from one level of effectiveness to the next. Healthy congregations are **outward focused** [emphasis mine], and they maintain that focus against tremendous forces that are constantly encouraging an inward bent.²⁷

A key distinction, for Borden, between a healthy and unhealthy congregation is the corporate focus. Plateaued is inward, while growing and healthy is outward.

10. Success syndrome. Churches that have had a season of ministry effectiveness tend to continue to do the same thing over. They bask in their success. They wrongly believe that what got them to where they are will get them to where they want to be. The past success of the church has put blinders on its current state. The culture has changed, yet too many churches refuse to adapt.

The point is, the world is profoundly different than it was at the middle of the last century, and everybody knows it. Even the church culture. But knowing it and acting on it are two very different things. So far the North American church largely has responded with a heavy infusion of denial, believing the culture will come to its senses and come back around to the church.²⁸

Denial may enable a church to enjoy the present, but it will have little hope for its future.

These root causes must be addressed for plateaued churches to be re-engaged, re-energized and re-tooled for twenty-first century effectiveness. “There is no doubt the church in America is experiencing a crisis. We really have only two choices in the midst of the crisis: panic or plan.”²⁹ The reality is many churches are in a panic. They feel alone, isolated, and inept to develop the necessary plan to re-purpose for the Great Commission. The need is not for new methods but a recapturing of God’s mission. “The need of the North American church is not a methodological fix. It is much more profound. The church needs a mission fix.”³⁰

This becomes, as mentioned previously in this paper, the role of judicatory leaders in the twenty-first century, to create an environment for missional change.” (202-205). ¹ see footnotes below for citations from within this quote.

[Citations from within this quoted material from Stevenson:

17 Mike Regele, *Robust Church Development* (Percept Group, Inc., 2003), 7.

18 Gary McIntosh and R. Daniel Reeves, *Thriving Churches in the Twenty-first Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2006), 15.

19 Gene Wood, *Leading Turnaround Churches* (St. Charles, IL: Church Smart Resources, 2001), 151.

20 *Ibid.*, 23.

21 George Barna, *Master Leaders* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2009), 111.

22 Stetzer and Dodson, 16.

23 McKain, 103.

24 Crabtree, 11.

25 Borden, 66.

26 McNeal, 25.

Leadership is needed to constantly evaluate, diagnose, and redirect from these root causes of plateau and decline. The kind of discernment that this will require necessitates that a leader be deeply grounded in healthy spiritual disciplines, particularly prayer and accountability relationships. Leaders seeking to help divert away from these failings will likely find that a mentor who has greater experience can be a great resource to help them become aware of blind spots and other problems. (Laster 22-23).

As if it was not hard enough for a leader to be a change agent, considering the paradigmatic blindness that an established organization can engrain and reinforce, there are also behavioral and attitudinal matters that create obstacles for turnaround leaders. Ron Crandall has identified some of these obstacles. You will note that there is some overlap with other lists, but this is a good thing for this analysis, for these overlaps help delineate the more common problems from those that are rarer.

- “1) A lack of vision to do God's will.
- 2) A defeatist attitude draining energy away from people.
- 3) Members attached to old ways and ideas.
- 4) Inadequate finances.
- 5) Inflexible older members.
- 6) Inadequate or rundown facilities.
- 7) Low levels of faith and commitment.
- 8) A cold shoulder toward outsiders.
- 9) Power cliques that create conflict.
- 10) A survival mentality.” (60-61).

Since Crandall identified these ten items as obstacles facing a turnaround leader, it is reasonable to study them as items external to the leader that must be overcome. A

27 Paul D. Borden, *Direct Hit* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 22.

28 McNeal, 2.

29 Gray and Dumond, 32.

lack of vision to do the will of God may make it challenging for a leader to awaken a church that has been in serious decline for a long time. Some actually believe God's will for them is to keep the church open and keep doing what they currently do though they may lament that they can't understand why more people don't want to do church with them. "The loss of vision often leads to a self-serving mentality. People seek their own interests instead of the interests of others." (Haskins 10). Low numbers can certainly be a morale destroyer, and a church that 'smells' of defeat will have a hard time making the good news of the gospel relevant to those outside the church and may not even try. (Crandall, 60). Items 3-10 above are all intertwined and serve to self-perpetuate each other. A leader has to work hard to help a church believe in the need to change and to have the faith to risk and trust that God is a God of abundance, not lack. There may indeed be both poor discipleship and a lack of desire for spiritual growth that need to be overcome. Finances, buildings, unwelcoming congregations, and a survivalist mentality may work to disincline a church from attempting change or moving toward health. If these factors cannot be improved, the spiral of decline will most likely culminate in eventual death. (Rainer *Autopsy*, 93).

Laying yet another list alongside those already presented, Anthony G. Pappas has identified five threats to the small church:

- 1) Traditionalism – what has been must continue to be the way we do things.
- 2) "Niceness": This represents the tendency not to want to upset anyone, even when true Christian love would call for accountability.
- 3) A club mentality where the church bases its work on serving the preferences and needs of its members.
- 4) Negative scripts: this is a perception problem where the church believes that it is poor and can't do what others do or even meet the needs before it.
- 5) The high cost of repairs and upkeep for the facilities. (7-9).

Pappas' list revisits some themes already shown by others on this matter, but again refocuses the turnaround leader on the attitudes and emotions that drive the lay leadership of the church. From the implications of these various problem lists, a picture begins to emerge that there are Organizational/Structural/Functional issues, Spiritual/Revival/Discipleship issues, and Emotive/Non-rational/morale/aesthetic factors that either work together to synergistically build up a church or clash with one another and ensure further plateau and decline. Thus, a trifecta emerges. Real, lasting, and effective interventions will most likely require that a leader address and improve in each of these categories to facilitate church vitality and growth. "The first step to turnaround is simply to help a congregation admit to a problem. Denial and confusion about the real issues often clouds the thinking of congregants as pastor and/or leaders try to face reality." (Dadisman 99-100). Leadership must help a congregation wrestle with its reality in order for it to bear fruit that lasts for the good of the church and kingdom of God. After reality is faced, a turnaround leader needs to inspire that a preferred future can be sought. "In order for a church to become truly vital, the congregation must have the wisdom to discern and understand God's vision for that particular context. Once a church's leaders understand God's vision, they must have the discipline to pursue that vision with single-minded devotion." (Roxby 52). It is at the point of discipleship that spiritual relationships and devotion prove to be key. There is little likelihood that there will be sufficient desire or ability to pay ministry commitment costs unless the spiritual elements of the congregation are becoming more vital. (Crandall 42-43). From there, the affective/emotional/morale factors can be reinforced by building unity and momentum around a common purpose that is communicated and majority owned and clearly and

sufficiently communicated in such a way as to use inspiration as the primary means of motivation. “A common purpose unifies and provides direction for the small congregation. The understood purpose defines the direction, ministry, and priorities of turnaround churches.” (Roxby 47).

Techniques and Strategies

Understanding the obstacles is important, but so is the work of understanding the techniques and strategies needed to continue to move the church toward health and vitality. Techniques and strategies will need to be dynamic as those which are most helpful at one stage may cease to be helpful in another or new ones may be needed depending on the tasks being tackled at that time. (Crandall 17). The plain truth is that turnaround is never a simplistic matter. Constant attention must be paid to the systemic, spiritual, and interpersonal dynamics of the church at every stage of its life and work.

Alice Mann has offered that for small churches to redevelop from decline they must:

- 1) Learn as a congregation to understand themselves and the environment they find themselves in.
- 2) Let go of structures and programs that are failing.
- 3) Discover who they are at the core by studying their history and story and clarifying their identity and role for the future.
- 4) Be willing to risk, make mistakes, work through disagreements, and learn from failures. All of these can be opportunities for God to work in the church.
- 5) Know that the possibility of congregational death is always a real one and may happen despite any interventions. (38).

The most helpful observation in this list is the challenge of helping a church understand that death is always a real possibility. However, the trick is to keep the church from becoming discouraged about this possibility of death. Instead the church must take that possibility up as a challenge to be conquered but not let it dominate their

thoughts and focus (as happens when survival becomes the mission of the church) or such thoughts will lead to a demoralizing fear. (Pappas 7-9).

Bicker's list of lessons learned from healthy small churches offers a view of the problem/solution from the other end of the spectrum:

- They have a very positive self-image. They don't equate church size with church significance.
- The church shares a common vision that gives it a sense of purpose and unity.
- Although family ties and community are important, those who visit the church are warmly welcomed and affirmed.
- Church members understand the importance of faithful stewardship and financially support the ministry of the church. Such a church routinely receives more than its budget requirements each week, which allows it to develop new ministries and programs. This also enables the congregation to support mission work around the world.
- Ministry is understood to be the responsibility of all the members of the church, not just the pastor. Laypeople are involved in outreach and visitation programs. They often lead the worship service, and sometimes they fill the pulpit when the pastor is away. Members seek opportunities to learn more so they can be better equipped to serve.
- People are encouraged to serve according to spiritual gifts, not by their seniority in the church. Leadership positions are filled by those who have gifts in leadership and who are spiritually qualified. (10).

Bicker's list of lessons addressed the obstacles by presenting a snapshot of how a healthy small church overcomes the barriers of poor self-image, lack of unity and vision, being unwelcoming and inwardly focused, lack of financial resources, no shared and gifted ministry, and leadership. While the obstacles are the 'infection', if you will, that makes a church ill, the lessons are what a cured church looks like after having overcome the obstacles. The things that caused decline have a strong connection with the exact changes that will be needed to bring about a church turnaround. (Eymann, Diss.)

Haskins reinforces Bicker's list by sharing the following instrumental factors for a church turnaround: visionary leadership, quality in music and worship, a willingness to

change, warm reception of visitors, attending growth seminars, the removal of obstacles, equipping laity for ministry, prayer, tithing, spiritual renewal, the addition of staff, and intentional ministry. (Abstract page). Haskins' list brings in two foci the other lists did not. The quality of music and worship (though this was addressed in the table by Sloan) are important spiritual and emotional/morale elements. The other matter he raises is the addition of staff. Staffing increases are one of those incremental stages where infrastructure needs to be added to support continued growth and changes in operations as the church that is becoming healthier begins to grow in number.

Another key issue is the matter of evangelism. Outward focus should imply evangelism, but it is not necessarily the case that even a statistically growing church is effective in evangelism. "The primary reason that small churches remain small and do not grow is because they are too inward-oriented and most of their resources are concentrated on serving themselves." (Haskins 24). Haskins does not explicitly address evangelism here. Priddy states: "In truth, the primary reason that churches lapse into long-term plateau and decline is because they are self-focused; its people are ministering to themselves.

Coupled with this self-destructive self-focus is the debilitating reality that leaders and their congregations are gripped by evangeophobia, the fear of evangelizing. Consequently, lost people remain lost, the churches continue in a downward spiral toward decline."

(164). "Comeback churches care about the things God cares about. They display that 'lost people matter to God' by the way they live, pray, and witness. This challenges and encourages others around them to live in the same way." (Stetzer *Comeback Churches*, 41). The Church of Jesus Christ was created to spread the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ (evangelism), baptize believers into the Church (incorporation), disciple the

Church to help them grow spiritually, and equip them for works of service (ministry).

However, it seems that many unhealthy churches are afraid to do evangelism. Could this be because they've been weak in providing discipleship? Unless new converts to Christ are continually being made, a church will die. If a church is not making any new converts, one could reasonably question whether that church is living out its Christian mandate and are thereby, for all intents and purposes, dead already. (Wood 26-27).

“Church leaders have such a high degree of inertia in the area of evangelism they must commit at least forty percent of their energy to outreach before the church will experience a balanced return alongside other priorities.” (Dadisman 77). Priddy notes that some churches deceive themselves by saying something to the effect of “other churches evangelize, but we grow people to maturity.” (164). The problem with this thinking is that a church that produces the kind of maturity that does not win souls for Christ is likely not producing a truly Christian maturity, or if it is Christian it is a disastrously substandard maturity. Priddy concludes that church leaders need to shift a church's focus outward and into evangelism in order to have a steady influx of people both new to the church and new to Christ. (164).

“A turnaround leader will help the congregation both value the past and anticipate the future.” (Kevin Owen 19). “In order to effectively serve the community in which the people of a declining church are located, the church must first discover what the needs of those around them are.” (Haskins 40). “Healthy churches, particularly healthy small churches, possess a powerful understanding of mission and their unique mission field.” (Roxby 55). “Your point of origin for growth is wherever you are right now – amidst your challenges, with your resources and in your current reality. How do you grow from

that that reality to a new place? There isn't one starting line, and you don't have to wait to reach a certain milestone before you can begin. Nothing is stopping you. It's a simple question to ask and keep asking. Where do we grow from here?" (Bobby Gruenwald "Where do we grow from here?" *Outreach* July/Aug 2014 electronic)

Montgomery has attempted to offer a list of best practices for small churches. His list is helpful information from a studied source within the United Church of Christ.

Based upon the practices of these six congregations and reflected in research on contemporary small membership churches, I hypothesize that vital small membership churches:

1. Are engaged with a particular context in which they exist and have ministries. They are aware of changes in their context and are trying to respond.
2. Are not focused upon (mere) survival, but have something more important that keeps them going (God). What was more important varied, but there was a reason that kept them going. The church was not an end in itself, but a means for personal spiritual growth, pastoral care, local mission, making sense of the world, and connecting with God.
3. Have a core group of lay leadership, usually in their 50s to 70s.
4. Have pastors who are especially adept at shaping the culture of the congregation. The old adage that the clergy in the small church aren't very important is emphatically not true. Clergy, lay ministers or ordained, were the key shapers of congregational hope and self-image. It was the clergy who kept prodding churches to focus upon practices, beliefs, and relationships rather than the "crisis-of-the-moment." It was the clergy who modeled caring for others (and coping with conflict) in helpful ways. But it was not programs (or even great sermons) that shaped the congregation. Rather it was a sense of vision, hope, and love that shaped the people of the congregation.
5. Have had significant (but not always recognized and acknowledged) input from the Conference in their lives.
6. Have worship services that emphasize the participation and joy of the community. Singing, a choir, the sharing of joys and concerns in prayer were key ways of congregational participation. Worship was fun and usually centered on music and sharing of joys and concerns.
7. Find ways of adopting new people into the "tribe", and find ways of enabling new people to adopt old members of the "tribe."

8. Mobilize effective resources to support appropriate ministries.
9. Eats well together. Participants at Listening Summits noted that one of the characteristics of their churches were the opportunities for communal meals (usually pot-lucks or fund raisers) which brought people together, nurtured sharing and built community. This was especially important for ethnic communities, where communal food was a way of transmitting ethnic heritage and values. Food is never just food; it provides an opportunity to work together, share similarities and differences in positive ways, an opportunity for group building and value formation. (31-34).

Section Summary

Church decline and plateau has been rigorously studied in many quarters. Small and, more specifically, rural church decline has proven especially challenged with regard to turnaround due to a multiplicity of factors. If a church can understand its true present reality, can have the right leadership, can understand the causes of its decline and redress them in strategic and appropriately changing ways, improve the quality and excellence of their ministries, focus on evangelism and welcoming of those outside the church, overcome poor self-image and vision deficiencies, make a high cost-commitment to health and turnaround, and can disciple and unleash the laity according to their gifts in strategic ministries, it is possible for that church to turn around.

Key Concepts and Definitions

Chapter one provided some definitions, but this section will elaborate on matters that are especially relevant to the study of turnaround for SRDNELC churches. The first matter deserving a bit of elaboration is the small church. Ramsden provides ten characteristics of the small church and its culture:

There are ten characteristics:

- 1) It embodies the common expectation of its members.

- 2) In it, almost everyone knows everyone else.
- 3) It has a sense of family.
- 4) Almost everyone feels important and needed.
- 5) Its group functioning is simple, not complex.
- 6) Its identity is in the collective personality and experience rather than in programs.
- 7) It claims a common history and is committed to a common future.
- 8) It understands and lives theology in personal, relational and historical ways.
- 9) It understands and implements mission in personal immediate terms.
- 10) It sees clergy as persons, pastors and generalists, not as specialists.” (11).

An easy way to summarize Ramsden is to state that the small church is a community mostly resembling the dynamics of family in both relationships and operations. The important thing to remember is that programs and techniques cannot lead the small church; relationships and harmony are keys to leading the small church. This means that changes are actually harder to implement in a quick manner. One might think that doing things on a smaller scale would make them more easily implementable, but it actually has little to do with size and much more to do with relational dynamics. A small church is small for several reasons, but a key one is that somehow, either consciously or unconsciously, it does not want or know how to make changes that will make it grow. That is why Crandall says, “[p]astors of turnaround smaller churches have a deep commitment as transformational leaders developing leadership in others. In addition, they highly value the biblical mandate to “make disciples” and they define success in terms of developing mature disciples as well as reaching out to make new disciples.” (Crandall 118). In the small church, you literally change the church one person at a time. Haskins has stated that a first step for small churches to begin to grow requires that the small church decides it wants to grow. (Haskins 28) He further argues that this change requires a change in leadership style. (Haskins 33). Changing the leadership style is one

of the best ways, and maybe the only lasting way, to do this. (Wood 24).

Health

The point of studying turnaround is to make churches healthy and vital. Roxby defines a healthy congregation as one that lives out its biblical purpose. (Roxby 13). Vitality, however, needs some further definition. To help illustrate the need for clearer definitions, the findings reported by Ed Stetzer regarding a study by the Leavell Center and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary are shared here. First, the church experienced 10 percent total membership growth over five years. Second, there was at least one baptism during the two-year study. Third, the percentage of church growth due to conversions was at least 25 percent. (Stetzer *Comeback Churches*, 26). Statistical increases, however, seem somewhat arbitrary depending upon who is defining things. Therefore, it seems prudent to consider the effect instead of the measure. For instance, a trend of numerical increase per year due to conversions such that attrition factors do not negate that trend seems like a good indicator of vitality and health. When viewed over five or ten years and averaged, such growth is bound to be significant. Another key to vitality is assimilation and discipleship. Again, it might be easier to look for subjective evidences than to find statistical metrics, especially for discipleship. Some might measure the growth of small groups and or classes and that might be helpful, but that approach fails to measure the maturation product of those groups. Thus, Roxby's observation:

This [transition] point comes when the church regularly sees new believers won to the kingdom who are intentionally disciplined in their walk with Christ and who are then involved in a regular ministry according to their spiritual gifts. Significant involvement of the church in ministry in the community in which it exists

indicates the beginning of this transition point. (13).

This equates to a healthy church being missional. How missional a church is could be the most appropriate litmus for evaluating the effectiveness of discipleship programs. Therefore, a determination of the meaning of missional is important. On this matter, Phil Stevenson cites a Conference report by Ed Rotz, District Superintendent dated July 22, 2011:

The Kansas District of the Wesleyan Church, in an effort to contextualize to the uniqueness of their environment, identified eight indicators of a missional church. [Ed Rotz, District Superintendent Conference Report, July 22, 2011.]

_ A missional church understands that it's the agency Jesus has chosen to work through to bring lost men and women into a relationship with Him;
 _ a missional church is more outward-focused than inward-focused and often does its ministry out of the creative tension that arises between the two;

_ a missional church instills within the redeemed that they are to "live sent" when they go to buy milk at Wal-Mart, medicine at Walgreens, gasoline at Quick Trip, and interact with bank tellers and operators of grain elevators;
 _ a missional church is led by healthy leaders, pursues agenda harmony, and works diligently to help followers of Jesus mature into fully devoted followers;

_ a missional church researches the needs and opportunities of its neighborhood and community and leverages its resources to bring Jesus' hands and feet to the needs around it;

_ a missional church so invests itself in the life of the community around it that if it disappeared, its absence would be noticeable;

_ a missional church participates in a multiplication effort by helping plant other churches;

_ a missional church stays in close touch with the heart of God so that He sustains its redemptive purpose (thus insuring that it doesn't veer off into thinking that it is little more than an ecclesiastical social service agency). (211-212).

These can be helpful meters of being missional, and thereby healthy and vital, by focusing on the fruit the church produced. A missional church continually advances the work of Jesus Christ in the world and bears measurable fruit for the kingdom of God. It can also be stated that a church that is missional will most likely be a healthy and vital church regardless of its size.

Rural

The issue of what constitutes a rural church is another matter that requires some elaboration. Holaday defines rural churches as attended by persons who primarily live an agricultural lifestyle. (Holaday 14). This definition leaves out the great number of churches that are rural insofar as they are in small population communities, whether or not farming is the primary industry. In many cases, rural should be defined as low population density rather than by the products produced by that community. Rural churches can be found in deserts, forests, lake towns, agrarian centers, and myriad small towns. Perhaps the type of rurality may call for an adjustment in approach to bring about turnaround, but population demographics and economic conditions are going to be key in defining rural. For the purposes of this paper, small towns and lightly populated areas are to be considered as rural regardless of whether agriculture is a key factor of the community.

The Bureau of the Census classifies "urban" as territory, population, and housing units located within an urbanized area (UA) or an urban cluster (UC), which has: a population density of at least 1,000 people per square mile; and surrounding census blocks with an overall density of at least 500 people per square mile.

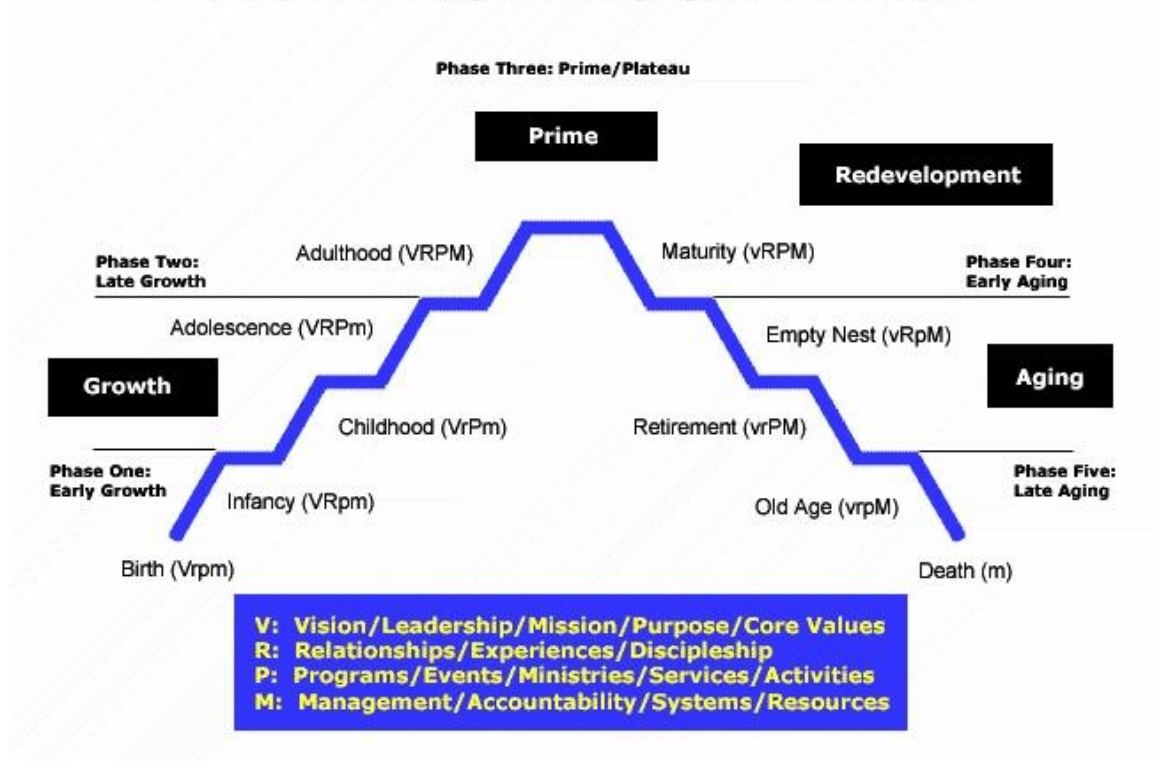
The Bureau of the Census classifies "rural" as all territory, population and housing units located outside of UAs and UCs. (hrsa.gov)

For the purposes of this paper, a rural area is to comply with the Bureau of the Census criteria of population density less than 1,000 people per square mile and not a town or city that is an extension of an aggregation of small towns and cities connected to a larger urban center.

Church Life-Cycle

Another matter of great importance is an elaboration on the church life-cycle.

The Life Cycle and Stages of Congregational Development



Copyright 2001, Rev. George Bullard, D.Min.

Figure 2.1 The chart above by George Bullard graphically demonstrates the life-cycle of churches. (Bullock, web site)

Bullock's chart is a 'thick-description' of the phenomenon of the church life-cycle. Duration at any one phase of the life-cycle is subject to variance, and plateauing and declining churches can have interventions that reboot or reset the life-cycle. Notice that a church in "Adulthood" is functioning well in the areas of Vision/Leadership/Mission/Purpose/Core Values, Relationships/Experiences/Discipleship, Programs/Events/Ministries/Services/Activities, and Management/Accountability/Systems/Resources. Each of the categories V, R, P, and M serve to augment and balance the others. A church is in optimum health at the adulthood stage when all categories are properly utilized and none are lagging. This paper is particularly interested in churches, however, that are in the "late aging" phase where Bullock indicates that they are between old age and death. Notably, these churches are doing poorly in Vision/Leadership/Mission/Purpose/Core Values, Relationships/Experiences/Discipleship, and Programs/Events/Ministries/Services/Activities, if doing them at all. Their functionality is strongest in Management/Accountability/Systems/Resources but even this is waning. Most churches in this category will die, merge, or find some other way to repurpose. Turnaround at this stage is very hard but some do. Learning from them is an incredible opportunity. "One principle should be noted. Turnaround ranges from moderate to severe depending on the life-cycle stage. Churches that consider turnaround while on the incline warrant a moderate treatment and make small and subtle adjustments. However, churches that wait until they are on the backside of the life-cycle in long-term plateau or decline face severe turnaround that requires major shifts and changes." (Priddy 173).

“Demonstrating this life-cycle and helping a church find itself in the progressive route between life and death has become an important tool for helping church leaders find their way out of stability and decline to vital ecclesial health.” (Stephen C. Compton 32).

Church Life Cycle Distinctive Characteristics:

Incline	Recline	Decline
Future-Oriented	Present-Oriented	Past-Oriented
Vision-Driven	Program-Driven	Structure-Driven
Community-Focused	Congregational-Focused	Core-Focused
Grows by Conversion	Grows by Transfer	Does not Grow

(Priddy 171).

Table 2.2

Priddy has arranged another template for looking at the church life-cycle, defining a growing church as inclining, a plateaued church as reclining (picture resting in an easy-chair), and a failing church as declining. It is useful to note that churches in the growth and vitality stage look to the future in many ways and look outward to the community so that their main growth is through obedience to the Great Commission. Whereas, a church in the last stages of decline is bound to a past hey-day -- locked into traditions and structures, perhaps even in bondage to them – and looking almost exclusively to the care of those already in the church, and, therefore does not grow. Eymann relates that to effect a working turnaround, there must be an intentional addressing of the causes of decline in the church. These factors of decline must be reversed lest such efforts be merely bandages that never address the disease. Without such intention the church will return to its root issues and continue toward demise. (147-148). McIntosh notes that the younger and smaller a church is, the more likely turnaround can be brought about by revolutionary change (changes brought about quickly and by a smaller cadre of leaders). (McIntosh 7-9). It may even be possible for one leader, such as the pastor, to effect the

needed changes if the church is small and young. It is more likely for turnaround to be started in an older and smaller church through a crisis initiated by a leader. (McIntosh 12-13). “A revolutionary change is appropriate for a church that is in a desperate situation, concerned about survival, or has turned myopically inward. It is often done quickly and may involve drastic and destructive changes, particularly when a church is at the end of its life-cycle.” (McIntosh 7-9). On the other hand, there is evolutionary change. This is a change process that requires much internal leadership, communication, and patience. Evolutionary change typically is how larger, stable (read plateaued) churches with a rich history of successful ministry may effect turnaround. (McIntosh 7-9).

Definitions Summary

It is important to understand small churches not only in terms of numbers but in terms of family dynamics, relationship characteristics, and informal systems. Church health needs to be measured in less easily quantifiable outcomes in order to more appropriately gauge whether a church is healthy. Mere statistical growth may not indicate health and vitality. An effective missional stance that is faithful to the fullness of the Great Commission is possibly the best indication of church health regardless of size. Being rural is about much more than economic products and should be defined by population densities and proximity to urban clusters or large cities. And finally, a rich understanding of the church life-cycle is helpful both as a diagnostic reality check and an informative tool regarding the intensity of an intervention that may be required to effect church turnaround.

Gaps Analysis in Literature

Most of the literature surveyed considers the type of church upon which this study centers as all but dead. In point of fact, Thom Rainer recommends that such a church find legacy options so that it may die with dignity.

Dying churches 10%:

“How might a church die well? Allow me to offer four responses as I conclude this little tome. And allow me to suggest four ways you can be part of a church that dies with dignity.

If you have truly acknowledged that your church is dying, what can you and the few members who remain do? What can you do in the last days of your congregation to make sure that your church’s death can make a difference for good for the Kingdom? Here are four options:

1. Sell the property to another church, perhaps a new church that has begun or will soon begin. You can be assured that the death of your church helped another church to live.
2. Give the building to another church. New churches are starting by the thousands every month in America. One of the greatest challenges is to find a place where they can meet.
3. If your church is in a transitional neighborhood, turn over the leadership and property to those who actually reside in the neighborhood. A few Anglo churches are beginning to do so where the neighborhood is now predominantly African American or another ethnic group.
4. Merge with another church, but let the other church have the ownership and leadership of your church. In simple terms, you are allowing a healthy church to take over your church. That is sacrificial. That is a way to die with dignity. (100-101.)

The above opinion is shared by many who study or consider church turnaround, but it represents a gap in the literature and study of church revitalization because, even when churches are normally studied for turnaround, the selected churches are in a far less egregious state of decline. Despite how difficult it might be for such churches to turnaround and become vital, it can be done under certain circumstances. However, the cost of doing this is very high in areas such as emotional toil, overcoming resistance to

change, and taking amazing risks. Hope must be offered, though hope alone is not a plan. (Stevenson 199). Likely, this dour forecast works to keep many churches from making a turnaround. It is equally likely that the low prospects for such a turnaround drives church leadership in the upper echelons to focus on more readily developed strategies like church planting and church birthing, particularly in regions where demographic studies have indicated a greater chance of success.

No literature was found that focused on churches in such a deep decline or near death position in the Wesleyan Church and the United Methodist Church. This is the intentional focus of this paper. No matter how many or few churches have successfully turned around, the information should prove useful.

Research Design

The research design for this paper is largely qualitative and descriptive. It involves a pre-intervention approach that sought out SRDNELC churches that have successfully turned around and are now thriving. To accomplish this study, judicatory leaders of the Wesleyan and the United Methodist Churches were contacted. They were asked to help identify any churches under their purview that met the design criteria and might be willing to participate in this study. They provided contact information. The information needed at this initial level of sortation is comprised of data related to: name of church, denomination, statistical reports on active membership, giving and spending, percentage of time clergy was available to the parish at the lowest point before the church began to turn around, and length of clergy tenure. Additionally, the name and contact information of the current pastor was requested. The pastor responded to questions

regarding his or her level of education, years of pastoral experience, a general description of the church and community, what year turnaround began to show, and statistics for active membership, giving and spending, number of persons engaged in outreach evangelism programs, and clergy percentage of time available to the parish since turnaround.

From the churches that submitted, there was a careful examination of the statistics shared so as to identify those which best described SRDNELC churches that were the worst off and yet turned around. However, due to privacy and confidentiality concerns these statistical referents were not shared in this paper but served either to provide generalized trends or were used to sort churches that were appropriate for the research criteria from those that were not. Care was taken to look for non-reproducible environmental factors like a sudden economic boom in the community. After these protocols were executed, five churches from over several states/regions in the United States were identified for selection for a questionnaire and interviews with clergy and laity. The goal was to compare these “real world” experiences with the gleanings from the literature review and discover and discern what provided for success in turning around their SRDNEOL churches. This information may provide key insights for churches in any stage of the life-cycle needing to halt plateau or decline.

Review of the Chapter

In this chapter, Biblical and theological themes were surveyed with regard to church health and revitalization. It was noted that churches were created by Christ and constituted by the Holy Spirit for the purposes of fulfilling the Great Commission, bearing fruit that lasts to the glory of God the Father, and building the Kingdom of Christ.

Several common woes of declining churches were examined in light of the Scriptures and solutions were introduced. Following this survey, relevant literature on church turnaround as related to SRDNELC churches was examined with an eye toward identifying key theories related to the causes and cures of church decline. A multi-layered holistic approach that involved Organizational/Structural/Functional issues, Spiritual/Revival/Discipleship issues, and Emotive/Non-rational/morale/aesthetic factors to study the reality of a local church and address its specific causes of decline and pay the high cost-commitment needed to bring turnaround to pass was discussed. The findings of various theorists were laid out and studied, highlighting common factors needed for turnaround. Specific key concepts were elaborated upon such as small church, church health and vitality, and rurality. The church life-cycle was presented to help further focus this study. Specific gaps in the literature, such as there being an apparent shortage of study on worst-case near death churches, was explained noting that this paper studied these type of churches in the Wesleyan and United Methodist churches. Finally, the chapter addressed an overview of the research design and data collection.

Chapter 3

Analytical Framework of the Project

Introduction

Chapter three features a presentation of the data collection plan for obtaining and evaluating small, rural, (formerly) declining, end of life-cycle churches (SRDNELC churches). Narrative analysis employed an historical qualitative narrative inquiry methodology to compare the responses gleaned from the churches studied against the general recommendations of the literature review regarding methods of turnaround for SRDNELC churches. There were a few stages of sorting and evaluation. The first action was contacting judicatory leaders in the Wesleyan and United Methodist Churches to garner their aid in finding churches that fit the project criteria. From those churches that were identified, statistical and demographic information was evaluated resulting in a purposive sample of five churches for study. The number of churches reviewed for this study was limited due to: 1) the actual number of churches that fell within the parameters of the study, 2) the need to provide in-depth, qualitative data via triangulation of data, and 3) reinforce the qualitative nature of the study. Also, time, costs, and manageability were human factors in limiting the scope of this study. After these churches were selected, an essay response questionnaire that was subjective in nature was sent to the pastor of each church. When the questionnaires were returned, they were analyzed for comparative similarities and key differences. There were also questionnaires sent to two key laypersons who were chosen by their pastor. When judicatory leadership had good knowledge of the church's turnaround process, they were interviewed via phone for further clarification and triangulation through multiple perspectives. Follow-up phone

calls were made with each person from each church for further clarification regarding their answers to the questionnaires. New questions outside the survey were not permitted by the Institutional Review Board. From the analysis of these data sources with comparison to the strategies from the literature review, parallels and anomalies were reported and summary observations were used to generate suggestive recommendations for SRDNELC churches to consider if desiring to effect a turnaround. These findings were shared with either the pastor or a key leader of the church or during the phone interview process for the purpose of member checking. Member checking is a process in which a researcher shares their interpretation of a person's answers to see whether they have understood what that person actually meant to say.

Nature and Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was finding solutions for the turnaround of SRDNELC churches. These plausible solutions will be uncovered using a comparison between existing literature and real-life scenarios from churches that have turned around from those conditions. The desired outcome is the discovery of replicable suggestive actions that are possibly generalizable to other churches fitting a similar profile thereby equipping them with information about tools that have been found to work in similar settings. A secondary outcome of this project will be to evaluate the utility of the surveyed literature as it relates to SRDNELC congregations.

Research Questions

RQ #1. What are the leadership behaviors and competencies (self-reported) of the pastor and church?

In any endeavor, there are competencies and practices (behaviors) that promote success and those that detract from the same. Research question 1 seeks to uncover the leadership behaviors and competencies that lead to success. Every context is unique and every leader is likewise. What types of leaders have turned around the extremely challenged churches that comprise this study? How was that leader specifically trained for this setting? Are there certain leadership assets more likely to work in SRDNELC churches? Does age and education matter? Some of these questions were answered by the demographic/biographic questions preceding the essay questions of the questionnaires.

To answer this research question, the essay questionnaires given to the pastor began by asking number years in ministry, range of education, and essay question 1 (Clergy questionnaire) asked about any specific training for turning around churches. Question 1 (Laity questionnaire) asked laity to evaluate pastoral skills and strengths. Comparison between the answers was a useful means to see if clergy reported skills and competencies were evident to the laity and whether other competencies not reported by the clergy were noted by the laity. Essay question number 2 in both clergy and laity questionnaires inquired about training given to the laity. The judicatory survey questions 1 and 2 were also consulted. These responses, when analyzed, helped evaluate tools given to the church to equip for turnaround.

RQ #2. What are the attitudes and postures of the congregation as related to turnaround?

Given the high number of plateaued, declining, and dying churches, there is a qualitative difference between such churches and those who pull out of the extreme situation of a SRDNELC church into a turnaround. It is probable that a significant factor in this change is found in the attitudes of the church community and the way these are practiced in the fellowship and in the local community with people who do not attend the church.

Research question number 2 was addressed in the answers given by the pastor to the following essay questions: 3, 9, 10, and 11. Laity responses to the following essay questions rounded out this inquiry with questions 3 and 6. Judicatory responses to phone interview questions 3, 4, and 8 also addressed this research question.

RQ #3. What attitudes and actions made the church healthy and attractive?

Something changed in order for these churches to turn around. Likely, it was the health and attraction behaviors of the church. Knowing more about these changes is very important.

Clergy essay questions 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and possibly 11 shed light on this research question. Laity essay questions 3, 4, 5, and possibly 6 provided insight on this question. Judicatory leader phone interview questions 4, 6, 7, and possibly 8 added to this answer.

RQ #4. How and for what rationale was the church organized regarding infrastructure and administration so that growth was supported?

Every church has administrative practices and structures. What is different about churches that have turned around? Can any of their success be attributable to changes in

administration and infrastructure? Of particular interest is where these churches have adapted infrastructure that either adheres to or deviates from the normative polity and administrative processes of their respective denominations. Could it be that some forms of polity, infrastructure, and administration promote turnaround while others discourage it?

Research question number four was addressed by Clergy Questionnaire questions: 3, 4, 5, 9, and possibly 10 and 11. The Laity questions numbered 3, 4, 5, 6, and possibly 7 added dimensions to the answer to this research question. Judicatory Leader questions number 3, 4, 5, 7, and possibly 8 addressed this research question.

Ministry Context(s) for Observing the Phenomenon

The primary context for observation was through survey questions with pastors, laity, and judicatory leaders with specific knowledge regarding the transition of these SRDNELC churches that have turned around. The study group was selected from among Wesleyan and United Methodist congregations. The sampling size was small in order to enable a more in-depth analysis within the time allotted and with regard to travel and funding limitations. The type of church that was sampled was in a community that was small in population in a region where the primary industry was not fabrication of materials or sales of services but usually agriculture, forestry, and other types of rural settings. Income and educational backgrounds of parishioners were not factored into the selection of the churches because that level of complexity is beyond the range of this study.

Participants to Be Sampled About the Phenomenon

Criteria for Selection

Participants were selected first by inviting judicatory leaders to identify churches that had previously been under forty in attendance (that had sustained plateau or decline for 4 or more years prior to turnaround), in a rural setting (roughly a general population less than 5,000 within 10 square miles), and late in church life-cycle (generally more than 50 years of age. Church age was of specific interest because the additional burden of outdated buildings is a factor of interest). Such churches were likely experiencing prolonged financial problems, and probably the church had a less than full-time pastor before their turnaround. Churches selected for study experienced turnaround such that approximately five or more years they have experienced growth in active attendance, currently have a growing number of ministry/mission expressions, and report persons being converted to Jesus Christ each year. From the churches that judicatory leaders revealed, those who were struggling the most before turnaround were given preference when selecting churches for study. A second key factor in selection was access to the turnaround pastor and a willingness to help with the study. (Appendix B).

Description of Participants

Pastoral participants in the study were selected regardless of age or gender as long as they fit the selection criteria. They needed to be the pastor who led the turnaround. Special interest was paid to training, education, gender, time available to the parish, and years in ministry in order to see if there were any suggestive predictors of success in turnaround. Judicatory leaders interviewed were selected based on the depth of their involvement with the turnaround. If they had only peripheral knowledge of the turnaround,

then they were not included. Lay person selection was based upon active roles in the church before, during, and after turnaround and a willingness to participate in the study. In the selection of laity, their age, education level, and number of years as a Christian were sampled in order to see if any interesting trends emerged.

Ethical Considerations

Since this study worked to identify suggestive and potentially generalizable interventions that might be applicable to SRDNELC churches, it was necessary that the sample churches be identified. However, because the sample size of this project was so small, the Institutional Review Board insisted that strict anonymity be observed to protect identities. Therefore, there are no church names or persons named. An alpha-numeric code (Table 4.1) was assigned to each church for ease of reference when discussing and differentiating between these churches while still protecting anonymity. Such codes were also assigned to pastors, lay persons, and judicatory leaders (Table 4.1). There was no key to this code provided in the dissertation. In particular, this qualitative narrative survey did not conduct experiments on persons or churches but recorded and analyzed the historical actions and experiences of those persons and churches in such a way there was no risk of imposing harm upon them. Also, survey responses and interviews were judiciously redacted and compiled into an appendix (Appendix F) wherein survey and interview questions were combined. Since no new questions could be asked, and only elaboration or explanation could be sought in the phone interviews, this collation of data aided in both redaction and presentation. Participants were given a consent form that indicated that what they shared would or could be reported in the project but in a way that did not specifically identify them.

They were, however, instructed to be judicious as to what they shared. Further, statistical information gathered was generalized (for instance, age ranges rather than specific age) where utilized to keep that information from being too specific and potentially putting a respondent at unnecessary risk. Finally, since the goal of the project was to find suggestive and potentially generalizable interventions, highly specific and potentially pejorative information was only shared if its inclusion was non-specific to any church, exposed a trend in more than one church worthy of notation, and was substantially valuable to churches needing turnaround. (Appendix A)

Procedure for Collecting Evidence from Participants

Using qualitative narrative inquiry (Tim Sensing 157) to seek the expressions of meaning (phenomenological insight (Irving Seidman 19)) from participants in the system under study, this research sought to evince understanding from those participants that could be compared to other churches in this study. From the perspective of this study, it is pre-intervention; however, it should be noted that this study is examining the interventions churches included in this study used to turn around, therefore, this was an historical methodology (Sensing 51). Clergy and two laypersons were given essay questionnaires tailored to each category to invite their reflection and recording of their understanding of the phenomena that brought turnaround to these SRDNELC churches as a purposive sampling (Sensing 159). Such a methodology sought phenomenological insight from these participants such that the significance of the events was contemplated, storied, and compared with other participants in turnaround situations. For the purposes of providing deeper insight into the participant's answers, the questions asked included

areas of intentional overlap so as to give them opportunity to speak about events in more than one way. The judicatory leaders were interviewed by phone for the same purposes. Purposively, this psychological representation of different but related questions was designed to thicken the phenomenological communication in their answers for better historiographical content. Using multiple sources as an overall approach also delivered the opportunity for a triangulation (Joseph A. Maxwell 128) of perspectives from within each unique church setting. Further, cross comparisons with the other churches under study evidenced potentially significant similarities and contrasts. To understand this research methodology, it will be explained by virtue of an analogy. Most seminary trained pastors know about the Harmony of the Gospels which is basically taking the documents of the four Gospel writers and comparing and contrasting their similar events, themes, and emphases as well as their unique events and even their divergent accounts of the same event. The process of synoptic understanding is exactly what the triangulation of perspectives in this study intended to do.

To accomplish this, there were three different questionnaires whose questions were vetted by the faculty of the Asbury Theological Seminary Doctor of Ministry Department and distributed by Survey Monkey: one for clergy, one for laity, and one that was administered via phone interview for judicatory leaders (if they were involved in the turnaround). To find the churches for the study, phone calls were made to judicatory leaders to discuss the study and invite their help. Following this, letters or e-mails of appeal were sent to judicatory leaders in the Wesleyan and United Methodist Churches (Appendix B) giving them the parameters to identify potential churches for study. They were asked to return responses within one week. From the results returned, churches that

turned around from the worst initial state were preferred and selected for the study. Eight churches were initially selected for the sake of having a manageable study with regard to size and time for completion. These selected churches were contacted by a phone call to the pastor to explain the study and invite their church to participate. This was followed by a letter containing the form for informed consent which was sought from all participants who were asked to return them within one week. Once informed consent forms were collected, the category-appropriate essay questionnaires were distributed to the various participants via Survey Monkey (surveymonkey.com) or by phone interview. At this point in the process, three churches decided that they did not wish to participate and so the sample was down to five. Results were collected electronically using Survey Monkey, placed in a matrix alongside any transcripts from clarifying phone interviews, and further coded manually, redacted, collated, and then analyzed by comparison within each local church against other local churches in the study and compared to the prescriptions offered by the literature review. The clarifying phone calls did not introduce new questions but only sought clarification along the lines of the questions within the essay questionnaires. There was a strong effort made to not introduce any new lines of inquiry into the study so as to keep the perspectives aligned with the same information sought from the other participants. After each church was manually coded and some understanding of the turnaround event of that church was described, a member checking methodology was used with at least one person from each church to make sure that what was being said was being accurately heard by the researcher. This information was then written up in chapter four. The subsequent evaluation cross-compared the

churches for emerging trends and then checked those against the prescriptions of the consensus of the literature review.

Procedure for Analyzing the Evidence Collected

After selecting the churches to be studied from the results provided by judicatory leaders, the churches were contacted and invitations to complete the essay questionnaires using Survey Monkey were sent. These were returned, read, and stored electronically both in the cloud and on hard drive as well as USB drive. While questionnaires were being returned, they were manually coded (Sensing 202) and cross-compared within each church for triangulation of perspectives among the church participants and the emergence of suggestive trends both positive and negative. Initial manual indexing was designed to capture major themes, while secondary manual coding worked to discover meta-themes of the originals. After this level of coding was completed, a phone call was made or written conclusions were shared with at least one participant from each church for the member checking procedure outlined above. Subsequent to the analysis of each church, the entire set of churches was compared and contrasted for similarities and significant divergences. These results were then compiled into a matrix (Appendix F). Suggestive trends that emerged from the comparisons and contrasts within the matrix that marked likely causative factors were compared against the prescriptions for church turnaround from the literature review for further trends and differences. In order to keep from letting the literature review drive perceptions in the coding process, the prescriptions of the literature review were manually indexed after all collected data had been sorted into the matrix.

Reliability & Validity of Project Design

Based on the author's personal experience with SRDNELC churches and the general understanding gleaned from the literature review, the questions given to the participants covered the range of most significant topics in turnaround situations as related to the research questions which drove this study. These questions were vetted for reliability by the faculty of the Asbury Theological Seminary's Doctor of Ministry program, specifically Dr. Thomas Tumblin, Dr. Russell West, Dr. Ellen Marmon, and Dr. Milton Lowe. Additionally, all aspects of this study were vetted by Dr. John Hatton, who served as the Ministry Transformation Project coach regarding this study. Because essay questions were used, participants were empowered to offer their sense of relevant events and to give meaning to them from their phenomenological viewpoint. As these viewpoints were analyzed from within the same church setting, narrative triangulation led to the emergence of an historical account of the factors perceived by the participants in turning their church around. Follow up clarifying phone calls and some member checking further aided in verifying the reliability of these findings. Also, John Laster, an expert church consultant from Creative Church Coaching, was brought in to examine the entire project after redaction. These results are reliable for the purpose of eliciting a thick phenomenological, historiographical narrative of the church turnaround in the churches studied.

Since this study desired to learn from a few SRDNELC churches, the method of query provided respondents the greatest opportunity available to the researcher to disclose what they experienced including some questions that overlapped into more than one research question. Also, there were open-ended questions giving them space and

opportunity to reflect and report on matters that they deemed very relevant that perhaps the other questions failed to address. Additionally, all questions were designed to require detailed narrative answers. These results gave data that was internally consistent and reliable from the perspective and experience of the persons participating.

Review of the Chapter

Chapter three presented the data collection plan for obtaining and evaluating small, rural, (formerly) declining, end of life-cycle churches. Narrative analysis used historical qualitative narrative inquiry methodology to compare the responses gleaned from the churches studied within themselves, with the other churches in the study, and with the general recommendations of the literature review regarding methods of turnaround for churches. Data was sorted and analyzed with preference in church selection being given to churches that turned around from the worst initial conditions. Essay questionnaires were distributed to the clergy and two laypersons. Phone interviews were conducted with judicatory leaders who were involved in the turnaround. Some judicatory leaders were very new and had little knowledge of the events of the turnaround. When the questionnaires were returned, phone calls were made for clarifying questions after which they were analyzed for comparative similarities and key differences. A process of contacting one participant from each church (often the pastor) for member checking was enacted. Analyses included those within the context of each church setting as compared with the other churches in the study and with a comparison to the strategies from the literature review. These analytic and evaluative processes represent the content of the next two chapters.

Chapter 4

Evidence for the Project

Introduction

In Chapter four, the information gleaned from the literature review is presented in summary as the takeaway from that phase of the study. The literature review is being compared to these five real world SRDNELC churches that have experienced different levels of turnaround as the research component of this dissertation. That comparison is made in Chapter five, but the summary is provided below for information. The primary purpose of this chapter is to report the findings of the surveys and interviews of the five churches studied. Because of the historical and phenomenological approach of this study, relevant answers shared are as close to actual quotes as privacy concerns permit. To make it easier to follow when an actual quote is being used, the text is bold and in italics. Analysis comparing and contrasting the literature review with the research is in the next chapter.

Survey of Literature Review for Suggested Practices Needed for Church Turnaround:

HEALTH & FRUITFULNESS:

Abiding in Christ is the way a church is empowered to yield fruit. Fruitfulness flows from obedience manifested as a church embodies holy love guided by the Holy Spirit. When a church produces bad fruit, this contradicts the actual faithfulness of a church. God expects fruit from a church, and if a church is unfruitful for long enough,

that church will die. Biblical fruitfulness for the church is counterintuitive in that multiplication does not happen first, but God's servants disperse into the world to harvest the fields, reclaiming people to make them the new humanity of God. Fruit is the result of the Holy Spirit but often occurs in cooperation with human agency. Churches should take heart because Jesus wants to see churches restored to fruitfulness.

Key ways that a church becomes unhealthy in ways that lead to plateauing and eventual death are: an inward focus, a self-serving nature, territorialism, power and control issues, being passive, becoming disillusioned, having a lack of clearly defined and owned purpose, a lack of communicated and owned vision, division in the body, and open conflict that is not addressed properly. Sins in the church like grumbling, complaining, fighting, false teaching, selfishness, tolerating sin, failure to love, and more promote church disease and eventual death. Repentance is likely needed as a first step in church turnaround.

“Faithfulness and fruitfulness are more Biblical measures for church health, not church size.” (Stetzer *Outreach* July/Aug 2013)

FACTORS RECOMMENDED FOR CHURCH TURNAROUND:

Vital Spiritual Life & Practices. (Crandall 48)

- Discipleship and Healthy Small Groups.
- Prayer, Bible Study, Spiritual Formation.

Leadership:

- Clergy as leader and change agent with strong pastoral leadership with a positive personality, good preaching skills, vision and strategic planning skills, accessibility to the congregation, and serving as an exemplar in faithfulness. The Pastor must also speak the language of the community well. (Keady Electronic) (McIntosh 7) (Samuelson Abstract) (Stetzer *Comeback Churches*, 15) Attend growth seminars (Haskins Abstract)
- Low turnover of leaders. (Hunter 230-232)
- Clear and constant communication. (Stevenson 203)
- Admit the problems/come to see the true picture/have church understand and own the reality. (Dadisman 99-100) (Mann 38)
- Count the cost of the preferred future. (Roxby 52) (Mann, 38) Know that death is possible.
- Develop unity around the mission. (Roxby 47) (Bickers, 10)
- Overcome survival mentality. The mission of the church is not survival. (Montgomery 31-34)
- Proactivity – refusing to settle for less than God’s best. (O’ Dell 58)

Vision: (Stetzer 15) (Stevenson 202-205) (Haskins, Abstract) (Bickers, 10)

- Strategic and goal oriented with constant measurement. (Hunter, 230-232)

Innovation: Seeing opportunity in challenges. (O’ Brien, Outreach July/Aug 2013)

- Purpose Driven Thinking. (Haskins 21) (Warren 15-16)

- Avoid success syndrome: “Don’t mistakenly think that the thing that got you where you are is the thing that will get you to the next goal.”
(Stevenson 202-205)
- Traditionalism overcome by embracing change. (Crandall 60-61)
- Church discovers and serves the needs of the community. (Haskins 10)
(Montgomery 31-34)

Positive Attitude and Atmosphere: (Ramsden 11) (Eymann *Great Commission Research Journal*, 156-157) (Crandall 60-61) (Bickers 10).

- Good self-image based on who a church is in Christ. (Bickers 9)
- Hospitality. (Crandall 60-61) (Bickers 10)
- Quality Music and Joyous Worship. (Haskins Abstract) (Montgomery 31-34)
- Good assimilation of new people. (Montgomery 31-34)
- Good Fellowship: (Montgomery 31-34) “Relationships and harmony are keys to leading the small church.” (Ramsden 11)
- Strong core of committed lay leaders. (Laster 46-47)

Healthy Systems: Efficient and effective church systems, administration, polity.

- Doing what should be done and letting go of things that are no longer working. (Montgomery 31-34) (Stevenson, 203)
- Minimal politics. (Hunter 230-232) (Pappas 7-9) (Crandall 60-61)
- Right division of labor: Pastor doing what the pastor should do and the laity doing what the laity should do. (Keady Electronic) (Bickers 10)

- High accountability of the whole church. (Stevenson 203) (Crandall 60-61)
- Root out organizational dysfunction. (Mann 38) (Stevenson, 203)
- Adaptability: able to embrace and manage change. (Haskins Abstract) (Stevenson 202-203)
- Adding staff when needed. (Haskins Abstract)

Evangelism: A church must love the lost. (Priddy 164) (Dadisman 77)

Support from Beyond the Local Church:

- Denominational input and help. (Montgomery 31-34) (Stevenson 109)
- Coach or consultant. (Laster 22-23)

Stewardship and Financial Adequacy:

- A culture of stewardship and generosity. (Crandall 60-61) (Pappas 7-9) (Bickers 10)
- Aesthetic Improvements: Facility upgrades. (Crandall 60-61)

The Table below indicates the alpha-numeric codes identifying the five churches from the research and identifies respondents by codes. One of these churches is United Methodist, the other four are Wesleyan. When directly quoting anyone, they will receive attribution only by code so as to protect privacy. A redacted (for privacy) summary of the interviews and survey results are posted in tabular form in Appendix F.

Church Code:	Clergy Code:	Laity 1 Code:	Laity 2 Code:	Judicatory Code:
Z-1	PZ-1	LZ-1	LZ-2	JZ-1
Y-2	PY-2	LY-1	LY-2	JY-2
X-3	PX-3	LX-1	LX-2	JX-3
W-4	PW-4	LW-1	LW-2	JW-4
V-5	PV-5	LV-1	LV-2	JV-5

Table 4.1 Church and Person Code Table.

Research Question #1: Description of Evidence

RQ #1. What are the leadership behaviors and competencies (self-reported) of the pastor and church?

In any endeavor, there are competencies and practices (behaviors) that promote success and those that detract from the same. Research question #1 seeks to uncover the leadership behaviors and competencies that lead to success. Every context is unique and every leader is likewise.

- A) What types of leaders have turned around the extremely challenged churches that comprise this study?

According to the literature review, the pastoral leadership was one of the greatest factors regarding church turnaround. Of great value, therefore, to this study is the pastors studied, their skills, the training they had or sought out, and the way they lived out and developed leadership competencies.

A factor of interest regarding SRDNELC churches is the issue of part-time clergy. The table (Table 4.2) below indicates that in the majority of these churches turnaround was effected by a full-time clergy or a clergy whose sole occupational focus was the church. Church Y-2 initially hired their pastor at a part-time level, but one of the key decisions they made in order to grow was to make that position full-time.

Answer Choices	Responses
–	–
–	0.00%
Part-time have additional secular employment.	0
–	25%
Part-time but church is only employment.	1
–	0.00%
Part-time at more than one church.	0
–	75%
Full time.	4

Table 4.2 Table of pastoral respondent's level of employment at their church.

The leadership assets of these leaders who've led turnaround are described by their laity in the following ways: 1) Passionate devotion to God and their ministerial calling was reported by four of the five churches. 2) High focus on reaching the lost/those outside the church while still loving and valuing the people inside the church was

reported by four out of five churches. 3) Scriptural preaching and teaching by these leaders was reported to be a key leadership skill in four out of five churches. 4) Love for people in friendly and approachable ways was factored in four out of five churches. 5) Vision and focus were mentioned as keys by five out of five churches. 6) Being a hard worker was yet another trait that emerged from three out of five churches. 7) Two of the churches indicated that the family of the clergyperson was a key benefit to the church in its turnaround. 8) Every church indicated in some fashion that the pastor had to be involved in the community in major ways.

B) How was that leader specifically trained for this setting?

PV-1 reported that there was no training given for turnaround or leading a SRDNELC church.

PW-1 stated: In the way of training, there were two great mentors when the pastor entered ministry. Both taught about change in a church and how important vision casting is in order for the church to follow. The pastor also attended some conferences that helped with vision casting training.

PX-1 shared that no coaching or training was received. However, prior to this current pastor's appointment, an interim was brought in to do a study on whether the church could stay open or should close. This study likely helped focus the church on the need and desire for turnaround.

PY-1 disclosed that there had been no coach or specific training. Since this church was not the first church this pastor had ever pastored, the pastor had a clear idea of how to lead and knew some steps the church needed to take to reach younger generations.

After about two years, the church went through refocusing training. There was some coaching and training for the pastor. Pastor PY-1 did a lot of reading for self-training; most helpful were studies that compared rural and urban mindsets. Together, this training and self-study was very helpful when it came to initiating change in the church. Further, the judicatory leader JY-1 revealed that this particular pastor studied the rural mindset to become expert in it, thereby learning how to influence the community well.

PZ-1 related that no training was initially given for this task. Training and support came with a new District Superintendent. The church participated voluntarily in a consulting process with an out of denomination consultant. They reviewed historic patterns in the church, demographics, effectiveness/ineffectiveness of past/present ministries, and strengths and weaknesses of current church leadership and operations. The consultation process helped develop leaders and the pastor. The pastor continued developing his/herself with monthly calls to a ministry coach and district training.

C) Are there certain leadership assets more likely to work in small, rural, near end of life-cycle declining churches?

- 1) As mentioned above, it seems that passion, vision, a high level of spiritual commitment, a focus on reaching the lost/those outside the church, loving people, being a good scriptural preacher, being loving, friendly, and approachable, being involved in the community, being a hard-worker, and being willing to get training, either on one's own or through other venues, are the reported leadership assets of the pastor for likely success in SRDNELC churches.

2) With regard to the congregation and its leadership assets, there was great diversity in the answers given, and the following observations come from their reports:

- a. Church V-5 indicated that from the laity's perspective, the only training was prayer time. The pastor reported sharing evangelism training with the laity while the judicatory leader reported that there was no formal training given to the laity but that the pastor focused on leadership development and addressing unhealthy dynamics.
- b. Church W-4 reported that the laity did not discern having received any training before turnaround, but now are active in helping other churches get trained. One layperson referenced a John Maxwell book, *5 Levels of Leadership*. Pastor PW-1 shared that the pastor started by training the board. At the first meeting, the pastor began training and vision casting regarding how the church could turn around. The pastor needed the leadership to be in unity and on board with the change that needed to be done. The board was excited about moving forward. The pastor began preaching about change and casting vision to the congregation. The church facility was in poor condition needing much work. The pastor started casting vision for getting the church guest-ready before guests arrived and then worked on getting the church spiritually ready.
- c. Church X-3 did not report any specific training given to the church for turnaround, as regards the laity, though one of them mentioned the

district lay-speaking classes, but it should be noted that these classes do not address turnaround per se. Pastor PX-1 related that there was no training yet but that the church is preparing to do a training program through the judicatory in the very near future. It should be noted that this pastor has begun training the church on the need for change and has led them in some worship enhancements.

- d. Church Y-2 received little in the way of formal training prior to the coming of the current pastor. They had been trained in spiritual gifts, and alongside the pastor, they moved into training together. PY-1 shares: *“Much of the main transition involved a large Adult Sunday School class. The pastor took the class through a series of books over a few years: The Purpose Driven Church, Experiencing God, and The Church of the Irresistible Influence. They took their time going through the books. The church focused on the book and then on the ministry of the church. With observations came changes. This training led to key steps of change. Every growth spurt required a huge step of faith. Training was being put into practice as it was being taught. The church built the bridge as they crossed it. This made the teaching real and gave a sense of unity. People understood the changes because they were in the class and helped initiate the changes. With growth, the church called in a consultant with New Church Specialties and walked the church through refocusing. Each adult did a personal refocusing and the leadership*

team did one for the whole church. This was two years into the turnaround and it gave a second burst of growth. Refocusing took six months to complete. The church studied history of the church, defined their core values, mission, etc., and acted on the changes that needed to be made as soon as they could.”

- e. Church Z-1 was not initially given any training, but when the pastor was brought in, the pastor began working to develop a sense of intentionality in every aspect of the church in order to open people’s spiritual eyes to their potential instead of their perceived limitations. Later, LZ-2 shared that training was given through a prescription process based on the work of Dr. Paul Borden. The church learned about the church life-cycle at a training session. They also learned about a church going through transformation, participated in dynamic worship, and attended small group sessions held during this training that helped them understand the assimilation process and how to turn community draw events into venues to attract regular attendees. It was important for leaders to receive these trainings as it laid the groundwork for future changes and helped the church understand how to prepare. The church people were given a deeper understanding of why this work was important and how to deal with opposition.

D) Does age and education matter? One pastor had some college but no degree, three pastors had a college degree, and one pastor had a graduate degree. Two

pastors were aged 41-50, and three were aged 51-60. The number of years they served in ministry ranged from 12-15 years. This data set is too small to draw any conclusions regarding age and education.

Research Question 1 Summary

Change leaders for SRDNELC churches in the study were rarely well trained for leading turnaround or the other issues of such churches. The pastors were hard-working, spiritually committed, evangelism-focused, and passionate whether they presented a precise vision or not. These pastors tended to view themselves as community pastors rather than church pastors and were approachable, engaging, and welcoming. Many of these leaders sought some form of training, even if they had to do it for themselves, and most of them began to train the congregations in order to begin to bring change. The majority was described as good preachers/communicators and people felt that they were being taught from Scripture. These pastoral leaders were often interested in getting the church involved in the community, and some got the community involved in the church by asking for help when building projects were beyond the means of the church. These pastors did not have any other occupational focus beyond that single church.

As changes began to happen and momentum and excitement began to grow, the laity were made healthier and trained. Some churches brought in mentors, coaches, and consultants and this further spurred growth. The laity increasingly found their faith enlarged, grew to be passionate about reaching the lost for Christ, and even began to understand that they had a mission and it was not simply 'church for them'.

Research Question #2: Description of Evidence

RQ #2. What are the attitudes and postures of the congregation as related to turnaround?

Given the high number of plateaued, declining, and dying churches, there is a qualitative difference between such churches and those who pull out of the extreme situation of a SRDNELC church into a turnaround. It is probable that a significant factor in this change is found in the attitudes of the church community and the way these are practiced in the fellowship and in the local community with people who do not attend the church.

The willingness of a congregation to embrace and enact change was another key component of church turnaround according to the literature review. This study evaluates what those postures and attitudes actually looked like in church turnarounds.

Answers to this research question are based on the reports of the pastors, the judicatory leaders, and some of the laity who have been leading in the church. Of the laypersons surveyed, 17 percent have been Christians longer than 26 years; the remainder have been Christians between 11-15 years. Nine females and one male were surveyed. One had completed high school, three had some college, three had college degrees, two had some graduate school or graduate degrees, and one had beyond graduate level work. With this small sampling, it is unlikely that any solid conclusions can be drawn from the composition of this group. However, it is reasonable to conclude that these respondents are likely around 45 years old and up.

Each church in this study presently has as pastor being the leader who initiated the change process that led to turnaround. When these pastors arrived, the church as they found it faced multiple issues, and not surprisingly, each of these churches shared the same issues. The congregations were mostly elderly, the churches had been in decline for several years, the communities were rural and economically depressed, the buildings were in need of repair/remodeling, and ministries were running in the fashion of 'we've always done it this way.' The pool of available leaders was very low, to say nothing of the dearth of trained leaders in the congregational body. In every case, the pastor found a church demoralized and beset by some kind of attitude problem, whether it be poor esteem, dysfunction, control and conflict issues, or worst of all, apathy. Two of the pastors were brought in as part-time, but as the churches began to embrace change they worked to make the pastors' sole occupational focus their church. The focus of the churches was inward and little to nothing was done to connect them with their communities. People were focused on what they did not have, could not do, and were fearful that their best days were behind them.

Something happened in these congregations that does not happen in a lot of other congregations in their situation. In many ways, there are similarities in each church to the others in the overall changes the churches came to embrace and support. Their journeys are unique and in that special singularity is a jewel of great worth. Because the focus of this paper is not on what is going wrong with SRDNELC churches, but how can they find ways to turn around, their stories of becoming more vital are important to this

research question. For, without doubt, it was who they were willing to be and become that made them stand out.

Research question three will go into greater detail as to how these churches reported overcoming the various obstacles that were holding them back. In this research question, the focus is upon the environment, the culture, and the attitudes that made this church winsome again.

Church Z-1: PZ-1 reported that the pastor began planning “no brainer” changes like children’s church, indoor plumbing, and visitation. Yes, you noticed – this church did not have indoor plumbing; they were still using an outhouse! The focus then turned on making the worship experience more relational and family friendly. Guests received welcome gifts but the church did not single them out in church services. To help with this, the church hired a keyboard player to develop a worship team with more contemporary songs and multi-media. Another improvement came about when they replaced pews with chairs, making sanctuary a multi-purpose space. The church began welcoming outside groups to use the building free of charge. In time, a second service was added. To show the community that the church cared about it, banquet style worship services to honor firefighters, town government, food pantry volunteers, etc. were held. The church began to offer refreshments during worship service. Then, as momentum and growth occurred, they borrowed money to double the facility size so that there was space for children and youth. Great intention was given to developing their reputation as an “*outside the box*” church that exists to benefit the community. If a ministry or program was not effective, they changed the format or discontinued it. After the building project

ended, they no longer needed a second service, so it was discontinued. The church, though small, “*decided to operate with a big church mindset.*” (PZ-1) The pastor leveraged their food pantry and other community opportunities to become the pastor to the whole community. These actions, though driven by the pastor, had to be accepted, embraced, and become the culture of the church or it would not have worked. Alongside the pastor’s actions, the church became open, more effective, enthused, began to believe, to take risks, began to be missional, to reach out, and to abandon apathy as passion displaced it. One layperson indicated that the leadership team helped older congregants accept change by communicating with them in a way that eased them into it.

Church Y-2: “*The greatest challenge was convincing the whole church to take steps of faith. There were skeptics. The church did not have money, volunteers, resources, etc. The denomination was ready to close the church. If we failed, no one would be surprised; we would know we gave it our all. People had to give up ‘their’ church. Everything changed. The core group had to willingly kill the old church, not just allow it [changes]. They gave up things they liked and had done for years. They gave up songs they loved, some of the traditions they loved. They did this because they cared for lost people and they knew it wasn’t their church. It was God’s church. They made incredible sacrifices. The church turned around because the leaders really believed that people are lost without Jesus Christ. The desire to obey God led to the turnaround. They gave up all because Christ gave up all, and they are his body. Another lesser challenge was money. The church was not in debt, but had no money. This became an area of faith. If we truly sensed that God wanted us to do something we would walk forward, counting on him to provide. He did.*” (PY-2) The atmosphere

of faith became contagious as LY-2 relates, ***“God is able to do more than we could ever even dream of if we make ourselves available to be used by him for furthering his kingdom.”*** The church began studying various books. When a principle was raised in the book, they prayed over that principle and applied it to their church and then took steps, sometimes huge risky steps, of faith. That part of the story will be explored in research question three.

Church X-3: The pastor of this church began working to make the environment more current in terms of worship and welcome and to get the focus out into the community. The pastor led the church to understand their spiritual gifts and increase their involvement in the ministries of the church. This is important because many laity are frustrated by being put into roles in the church for which they feel that they have not been trained and have no idea how to perform. Regarding this problem, LX-2 shared, ***“Many [congregants] don’t know the denominational beliefs and no continued education is offered after membership. People are asked to assume positions/roles without job training. The church needs all kinds of leaders for Sunday school, youth, etc.”*** In this regard, this church has had to do discipleship training to remedy the lack of vision and focus that led the church to forget its real mission.

Church W-4: This church had some unique problems in addition to the ones common to all the churches in the study. The change in pastoral leadership that brought in the new pastor was effected by the sudden, tragic death of the previous pastor. This created a church in trauma and grief. There was conflict and resistance but describing it would make the church too identifiable. The building was in terrible shape and building issues of almost every conceivable kind plagued the church. District Superintendent JW-

1 relates, *“Facilities were a big challenge. This church layout made for a difficult building. Considerable building renovations were needed. The spouse of the new pastor was skilled at repairs. The parking lot, driveways -- all kinds of issues had to be addressed. They remodeled the basement, transitioned from pews to chairs, and made programmatic changes. The building was redesigned around and with a great emphasis on children’s ministry. The former ministry was not reaching the larger community. They had to enlarge their capacity to see what else they could be doing as a church.”* Once the pastor helped the church overcome conflict and strife, and as outside donors helped the church with money and other donations, including work in renovation, the congregation began to embrace the pastor and the changes more and more. Pastor PW-4 shared, *“It begins with vision casting. You need to cast the vision of turning the church around and then you need to get the people excited about the future. You have to be creative and look for ways to pay for the vision. You have to make the church guest-ready and God-ready and then begin to invite the community in with outreach events.”* The way the church changed is well and aptly summarized by the District Superintendent JW-1, *“The environment of the church changed and became cheerful. Building changes led to a positive aesthetic. They recreated the whole platform, put in a new sound system, and changed worship with contemporary worship. They found that it was okay to sing new songs. They placed a larger emphasis on children’s ministries. And when new people were coming and liking the church it was motivating to the people. This pastor is a good communicator and helped them build hope and have a vision for the future.”* Environments like this are likely what a SRDNELC church needs to be postured for lasting turnaround.

Church V-5: The pastor of this church arrived finding a defeated attitude and a difficult financial situation that was focused on the mission of the church staying open. PV-5 shared, ***“The main reason this church faltered was that they were afraid to go any length of time without a pastor and called the first person to candidate. It was a terrible fit.”*** Pastor PV-5 started as a bi-vocational pastor and took the following tack: ***“First year, the focus was on healing. The second year the focus was on getting the people to take pride in their church and do repairs. Programs that weren’t working or were poorly staffed were dropped on the premise of doing one or two things well versus ten things poorly.”*** Again the issues of attitude, building improvement, and healing a hurting congregation arose. Pastor PV-5 began to lead this church by helping them, focusing them, and redeploying them in ways that would yield more motivating results. Regarding this leadership by the pastor, District Superintendent JV-1 stated, ***“This pastoral couple is very strong in pastoral care. The pastoral couple love on the people. The balance [of changing congregational attitudes] is done by pastoral care. In a small church pastoral care is key. In order to effectively challenge the church to open their arms to the community, you’ve got to have a shepherd’s heart and the heart of an evangelist.”*** The pastoral couple won the hearts of the people and then the community. They then had the influence to lead the church back to its real purpose. It would seem that love led the changes in this church; as love grew in influence, the church rediscovered the power of being loving. One hallmark that both pastor and laity remarked upon was the faith based decision of the church to take 10 percent of its income and give it to missions when they could not afford to do so. LV-2 shared, ***“Tithe 10% of***

offerings to missions and use it for God's work. When you are truly doing God's work, he will bless it." Herein is demonstrated hope, love, faith, and intention, all of which were changes in the culture, attitudes, and even the environment of the congregation.

Research Question 2 Summary

It seems that it was very important that the people of a SRDNELC church needed to be willing to be led and able to be encouraged. There were legions of challenges, but perhaps the prime obstacle to overcome was whether or not the church could and would rediscover who they were in Christ and redeploy on the true mission of the church. In these churches, it seemed to be the case that these people were aching to be led but may not have realized it, and maybe the pastors sent to these churches were the right persons for the time, or 'a good fit'. Congregational attitudes and postures respond to and reflect or reject the leadership, or lack thereof, they receive. In this study, the churches changed as they were led to take pride in their buildings and remodel and repurpose them for ministry in and to the communities in which they were situated. The people changed as pastors loved, led, and taught them, sometimes right at their sides swinging hammers in the hard work that needed to be done. The pastors consistently focused on the church being for the lost, for the community, and the pastors made themselves community pastors. This changed the way the church people saw themselves, the community, and the way the community viewed the churches. Updates in worship styles, furnishings, and sound systems were more about hospitality and inspiration than about change for change's sake. Some of these churches had struggles with those implementations, but the congregation came to see the value and embraced the changes. The result was a positive

atmosphere among the congregations that new people found winsome. As the churches rediscovered their hope, passion for outreach grew and accommodations for children's and youth ministry became early and important factors for these churches. It's interesting that every church faced financial problems, but as the congregational postures and attitudes changed, one way or another, whether from inside or outside the church provision happened, and none of these churches reported any kind of change in the financial situation of the communities in which they were located. Surely the realization that God was providing had an encouraging effect in these churches. There was loss going on in these churches too. Some people did not stay with the church; some had to be 'encouraged' out. People were losing dysfunction, programs that no longer worked, hallowed comforts of being ingrown, missional drift, and low esteem. Most importantly, congregants were losing doubt while discovering that while faith can be scary, it is actually rewarding and exciting.

Research Question #3: Description of Evidence

RQ #3. What attitudes and actions made the church healthy and attractive?

Something changed in order for these churches to turnaround. Most likely it was health and attraction behaviors of the church. Knowing more about these changes is very important.

This is a much more difficult concept to pin down. The literature review spoke of environmental matters like up-to-date settings, vibrant music, engaging sermons, missional postures and practices, and welcoming behaviors that generated successful assimilation of newcomers into the life of the church. The actual interplay of these and

other factors in the study churches is illuminating. As pastors came into these churches, it was clear that the churches were in trouble so this question must be addressed first from the challenge side and then from the remediation that addressed the challenge. This is the WHAT of these churches that was done to overcome problems and grow. The major themes to emerge are presented below.

Challenges and what efforts were effective in meeting them

Money: All of these churches had monetary issues when the pastors were brought in. Pastor PW-4 found monetary help for the building repairs by getting donations from outside the church. Additionally, one of the internal fiscal changes was that the church actually started collecting an offering by passing the plate instead of using a donation box at the back of the church. Church Y-2, through their book study in the adult Sunday School class, became convicted that they needed to make their pastor full-time and took a huge leap of faith by deciding to do that. Then they had to build a parsonage. This was huge for the community because a new building had not been built in that community for over forty years. Monetary woes were addressed by faith. Their success speaks to God's power. It bears noting that the old saw for funding a church, "The money we need is in the fish's mouth," is true in the way these churches overcame and found supply. They reached out into the community and made the community know that they mattered to the church, and people began to come. With the new people came needed revenue. LZ-2 said, "*Many small things led the way for bigger changes. We built a bathroom funded by donations from outsiders. We put in a parking lot for a very small cost. We slowly*

modernized our worship. We improved the pay package and made budgetary decisions based on faith rather than dollars in the bank.”

How the Church Viewed Itself and the Community: SRDNELC churches tragically are discouraged and disheartened. Many of the churches in this study reported this as an obstacle to be overcome. Pastor PV-5 focused on healing the congregation and getting the people to take pride in their building and spruce it up. PV-5 also helped them identify programs that weren't working and remove them so that they could focus on areas where they could win. Layperson LW-2 shared that the pastor engaged people in the work so that they felt valued. The low esteem seems to have been countered by a congregation being valued, encouraged to heal, to finding things they could do like building repairs, and rediscovering their God-given mission and purpose. Lay person LZ-1 spoke of how the pastor encouraged the congregation to accept change and desire to move forward in faith. Pastor PW-4 declared, *“It begins with vision casting. You need to cast the vision of turning the church around and then you need to get the people excited about the future. You have to be creative and look for ways to pay for the vision. You have to make the church guest-ready and God-ready and then begin to invite the community in with outreach events.”* Pastor PX-3, in regard to helping change the church's view of itself and the community, said, *“Help them remember their Christian mission.”* Pastor PZ-1 fostered and developed a sense of intentionality in every aspect of their existence as a church. This approach opened their spiritual eyes to their potential despite their perceived limitations. PZ-1 said, *“Always keep the ship moving. Remind people that the church does not exist for those already attending, but for those who have yet to enter the doors. I developed a rapport with the congregation*

and gave them reason to trust my leadership. I worked to be a people-focused pastor. It is important to intentionally look for opportunities to develop a people focus in each person who comes in the door.”

How the Community Viewed the Church: SRDNELC churches often have little to no impact on the community due to problems of small attendance, inward focus, and decaying facilities as well as missional drift. Because these churches are in small communities, the way they are perceived by the community is an important matter. District Superintendent JW-4 exclaimed, *“The first thing they needed to do was to repair the community reputation.”* Lay person LW-1 shared, *“Part of our turnaround process was to fling open our doors to the community and say, “Here we are, and here is your God who loves you.””* Pastor PY-2 reported, *“We had to open our arms or everything would not work. This was not a program; it was an attitude. We included people in decisions and asked them to help us with all these new things we were doing. We allowed new people to start new ministries and lead them, if they were growing in their faith. At one point we expanded the size of the leadership board so some newer people could be on the board. To do all this we had to be willing to surrender the control of the church to God.”* To help the community see the church in a new way, Pastor PZ-1 and that church offered the use of their building to organizations in the community free of charge. Church Y-2 tackled the community by doing a number of programs. PY2 shared, *“Each program or event in and of themselves were not as important as the fact that they were intentionally done to reach out. Friend Days, Fall Round Ups with hay rides. BBQ lunches, back to school parties, school is over parties, summer picnics, pool parties, bonfires, western days, etc. We had special children’s programs on the*

weekends like a puppeteer doing a service. Youth Sundays with rock and roll teen-focused sermons. Events in the community that were open to all and resembled a carnival setting. Handed out free water at these events. Kids free activities with prizes. We did not do these as fundraisers, we gave everything away for free. We heavily invested in VBS and made it so incredible that kids wanted to be there.” Pastor PY-2 attended every junior and senior high school sporting event he could. Pastor PV-5 advised, *“Get involved in the community. Hold pig roasts or sponsor a community day with games, a parade or whatever. Visit community people in their homes and invite them to yours. Small communities are very tight-knitted groups.”* These pastors taught their congregations to get out of the church and get those outside of the church inside. The key is a desire to reach lost/unchurched people and really love them. Pastor PZ-1 reported, *“Great intention was given to developing our reputation as an ‘outside the box’ church that exists to benefit the community.”* District Superintendent JV-5 said, *“The church made an intentional focus on the community. They worked with the fire department in organizing community events for celebrations. They coordinated religious release time for school children coming to the church on weekdays at the end of the school day to learn about the Christian faith. They used the facility and property to make a positive impact in the community.”*

Economic factors affecting rural communities: Financial hardships are often a common thread in small rural communities, and while the churches in this study could not fix that problem in its entirety, many of them leveraged what they could do to ameliorate the pain in their communities by missional acts of charity that were also leveraged for means of contact and outreach for evangelism in their communities. Pastor

PZ-1 stated, *“We operate a very successful food pantry that connects me with the majority of families in the community. There is a summer feeding program (government funded program using church facility) that provides lunches for children in the community.”* Pastor PX-3 recounted, *“Using a free store, we focused on a more direct approach to the community. It was important to meet and talk to the needy in the county.”* It would seem that the relational connections were more important than a church merely being seen or noticed doing good works to help people in the community. Church Y-2 created a group called ‘Hammerheads’ who helped people in the community with home repairs. Imagine the relationship building that was concurrent with the time these workers spent repairing homes. Lay person LX-2 related, *“We phone, stop by and visit with people we know who are under distress. We reach out to our neighbors, friends, and family to attend activities and church services. We work on an equal level with people in need, treating them with respect.”* Love was meeting needs relationally and with respect; this is apparently very powerful, especially in these small rural communities.

Workers: In SRDNELC churches, there are rarely enough people, and of those, many are very elderly so to do all that things that should be done, staffing is a challenge. However, the churches in this study came up with some creative ways to overcome this problem. Church PZ-1 actually hired people who did not attend their church but who were qualified to assist with Sunday morning. Some of them later became part of the church. Pastor PW-4 stated that leaders were recruited by calling and talking to them. When they came on board, there were training sessions that also cast vision for the ministries. Pastors themselves worked hard. And, again, as with fiscal resources,

workers increased as numbers increased. A positive, winning, purposeful, celebrative, and passionate environment was magnetic and these churches continually worked to make them so.

Facilities: In many places in this chapter, multiple building issues have already been cited, most of which needed redress very early in the turnaround process. As this has been stated already, it is reasonable to conclude from the churches studied that building issues need to be addressed and that both creative means to fund and repair them, as well as innovative ways to make the facilities function for the community as more than a building exclusively for religious purposes, was important for SRDNELC churches.

Music: In every church studied for this dissertation, contemporizing the music and making the worship experience celebratory was a key change that was both needed and a challenge for some in the church to accept. Some found creative ways to help older congregants adjust to these needed changes. Pastor PY-2 stated, *“We began by singing choruses and moved forward using overhead and hymnals. We made the screen palatable by showing scenes from local school sporting events before church. And when we started live contemporary music, we enlisted teens to help with worship team. Grandma couldn’t get too upset if her grandchildren were part of the service.”* Layperson LX-1 related, *“Our music is more praise and worship with some old hymns worked in. Video has been introduced over televisions that display various songs, videos, and messages. Praise and worship songs help keep the worship time upbeat.”* Incremental changes seem to be a helpful key in modernizing and making the worship experience more celebrative.

Hospitality and Assimilation: When a church is small, it is very easy for a guest to discern whether they are welcome or not. Hospitality is the front porch of the assimilative goal of bringing new persons to Christ, into discipleship, engaging in the church life and joining, and then deploying in ministry. The churches in the study worked on their welcoming and on being the kind of place where people want to belong. Pastor PV-5 said, *“I trained greeters and insisted that every board member make it a point to engage newcomers.”* Note that in reviewing the answers given by these churches, the questions asked of them apparently did not solicit clearly enough because none of them described actual assimilation practices in any depth. Church consultant John Laster stated that they probably did not describe them because it is rare for small churches to have defined assimilation practices. (Laster conversation).

Ministry Foci & Children and Youth: PY-2 shared, *“We enlisted teens to help with worship team. We did away with Sunday School opening and stopped using denominational quarterlies. We have three adult classes: one for new Christians, one special interest class that goes through a book study, and one verse-by-verse Bible study led by the pastor. Children’s Sunday School curriculum is video-driven. We try to make it exciting and active. To reach out to youth: for a time the church agreed to let me act as if I were the youth minister. I began subbing at the high school and junior high to get to know students. We started movie nights and game nights. Then we started a regular Wednesday night youth group. We made it loud, fun and intense. We used crazy group games, rock-type worship music, and animated sermons. The church sent youth to youth camp and made sure every kid had a paid way to go. Teens*

in rural settings have little to do, so it did not take a lot of bells and whistles to get them involved. The church started using the teens in church and their parents would come and watch. This was a major driving force in the church's growth.

The church stopped having Sunday night services. They added small groups, but they were not too structured. They had fellowship and some kind of Bible study. Regarding Sunday worship, the church used skits, videos, and object lessons all the time. Focus was on action. And the church started doing major outreach events and special weekend services like Friend Days.” Notably, the churches that increased their focus on children's and youth ministries early in their turnaround experienced much better returns on attendance increases. This may be a key to one of the early priorities in turnaround.

Research Question Three Summary

In order to make the church attractive, the obstacles, attitudes, and ineffective practices had to be redressed. The pastors in this study generally found a need to encourage and invigorate the perspectives, esteem, and focus of the churches. Particularly, there was a need to fix buildings, contemporize the music, and make the overall experience of worship more celebrative. Leadership had to be recruited and developed. Monetary woes had to be overcome by faith and creativity and a renewed passion for reaching lost/unchurched people. Focusing on ministry to children and youth in the community was a particularly enlivening growth strategy. Helping the church change its view of the community helped the community come to understand that the church loved them and wanted them to be part of the life of the church. As the church engaged the community by both meeting them at the point of their need, but with love and respect, and by

creating and participating in events that brought the community together, relationships were built. It is in the context of relationships that small rural communities were either embraced or rejected. Excitement and momentum were built with each 'win', and as the pastors continued to communicate the vision and mission of the church while being in the community themselves, turnaround began. Some churches had to get outside help to make up for the shortages of workers, but as they grew, these problems and monetary woes subsided because of the growth. By making their churches appealing, and by rediscovering an evangelistic zeal to see lost people saved, the churches improved their hospitality and people became part of these congregations. These churches discovered how to be in and on mission in the context of their small rural communities through intentional, loving pastoral leadership and congregational acceptance and stepping out in faith because they decided to be obedient to God's mission for their church in the places where they were.

Research Question #4: Description of Evidence

RQ #4: How and for what rationale was the church organized regarding infrastructure and administration so that growth was supported?

Every church has administrative practices and structures. What is different about churches that have turned around? They were small, limited, and greatly challenged, but they found ways to operate that did lead to growth. Can any of their success be attributable to changes in administration and infrastructure? Of particular interest is where these churches have adapted infrastructure that either adheres to or deviates from the normative polity and administrative processes of their respective denominations.

There were no reports of the church deviating from the allowed structures of their denominational polity as an aid to turnaround. Some pastors did need to tighten or add a few things in polity or infrastructure when they arrived. One of them, Church Y-2, because it became multi-staff and then multi-location, had to become more staff-led with an advisory board but this is not a departure from allowable forms of polity. About these adaptations and changes District Superintendent JY-2 related, ***“As the church grew they hired an assistant pastor. Then they expanded administratively the pastoral staff and its responsibilities. It is very important to give personal care to the congregation. The church gave the pastor permission to expand staff. Change was facilitated by having an emotionally mature group of leaders at the church that enabled them to give him permission to make changes.”*** Leadership development and trust among the core leaders of the church and the pastor made a large difference in this church.

It could be that some forms of polity, infrastructure, and administration promote turnaround while others discourage it. While nothing reported by the churches in this study directly indicated an answer to this, there were a few hints at some polity issues that might drive SRDNELC churches from turnaround. One is the call system of the Wesleyan Church. Church V-5 related that in the past the church feared going any period of time without a pastor and wound up with the wrong one before the turnaround pastor now serving there. Regarding church W-4, District Superintendent JW-4 indicated that the church had to be helped in managing transition to be ready to receive a new pastor. The United Methodist polity could possibly create some issues that hinder turnaround because of the frequency of pastoral changes by the appointment system; the turnover in SRDNELC churches tends to be especially frequent. However, this is an anecdotal

observation made by the author and not explored in any of the churches studied for this dissertation. The issue is raised because the pastor of church X-3 will be moved at the time of pastoral change in 2016. What impact this will have on the church would be interesting to know.

Another matter regarding infrastructure that was mentioned in multiple ways in the responses was the lack of qualified volunteers and trained workers. Some might see this as a leadership issue, and it is that, but leadership needs to implement manageable systems of investment and training to continually raise up qualified leaders. This might also be subsumed under a discipleship heading, but discipleship does not happen well if done haphazardly or by accident. These pastors came in and found ways to train and raise up the leadership that continued to grow and adapt as the churches acted, learned, adjusted, and grew. Church Z-1's pastor PZ-1 shared, "***There was not much [polity or administrative] structure to change. This church is pastor-led with an advisory committee. The consultation process recommended the addition of an administrative assistant freeing me for other duties. Changes came through developing ownership and leadership in the people. I developed my own administrative skills by reading.***" Whereas, church W-4's pastor PW-4 reported, "***I made the board structure use less members, reducing the size to a manageable number. Also, I put a trustee board in place where there had been none, and created a nominating committee. I also started having board meetings every month instead of once or twice a year. I added leadership training at each meeting.***" Leadership training and expectation driven by visionary, purposive intention were found in these examples and would seem to be a key cog in the machinery of church infrastructure that is needed for SRDNELC churches to turn around.

The short answer to this research question is that polity and infrastructure were reported to need more of a refocus in intention according to the vision and the goals of the church rather than that structure led the changes. It may be the case that infrastructure and administration largely require agility so as to adapt as vision and intentionality drive the changes. Agile structure and an adaptable vision-driven process may have to precede measurable incremental infrastructure changes. PV-5 talked about some of these intentional changes when he said, ***“You have to identify the problems. Small churches stay small for a reason. In our case our problem was an informal leadership control issue. Do not be afraid to have the difficult conversations and let scripture speak to the issue. Be prepared to take action if necessary.”*** The pastor led by using the guidelines of the formal polity as one tool along with speaking the truth in Christian love to redress problematic power and control issues.

Remedies to power dynamics and dysfunction appear to be a relatively common thread with three out of the five churches indicating dealing with various incarnations of these kinds of issues. The real key was that they did deal with them. Some lost a few people. It would seem that healthy power dynamics needed to be addressed for church turnaround to be possible.

Communication and preparing the congregation for change was raised in several instances. Parishioner LW-1 remembered how during the first weeks and months of the pastor’s work, even though conflict was going on, the pastor built good relationships with the people. Relationships are the wheels of influence, and communication is the engine that drives them. This parishioner also remembered the way the pastor would take time each week to brief the congregation on what was going on, changing, and had been

completed. People felt included and informed. Parishioner LY-1, when sharing about the early days of the turnaround related, “*Communication was key. If someone missed on Sunday, we took them a bulletin or mailed one.*” It seems that informal channels of communication may be at least as important as formal ones in the small, rural church. Pastor PY-2 said that he decided that he simply would not take offense but would hear anything a sincere person wanted to talk about. This was a powerful stance to take and one that, no doubt, continues to call for enormous self-control and much prayer. The way the church communicates is a very important part of its infrastructure, and these churches were able to communicate well enough to turn around from great decline and near death. Interestingly, every one of these pastors was described as a good or great communicator/preacher/teacher.

Another infrastructure issue may be the pace of change and the buy-in and support of the churches’ people. Church Y-2’s pastor illustrates the pacing in their context, “*Much of the main transition involved a large adult Sunday School class. I took the class through a series of books over a few years: The Purpose Driven Church, Experiencing God, and The Church of the Irresistible Influence. We took time going through the books. We focused on the book and ministry of the church. With observations came changes. This training led to key steps of change. Every growth spurt required a huge step of faith. Training was being put into practice as it was being taught. The church built the bridge as they crossed it. This made the teaching real and gave a sense of unity. People understood the changes because they were in the class and helped initiate the changes. With growth, we called in a consultant with *New Church Specialties* and walked the church through refocusing. Each adult did a*

personal refocusing and the leadership team did one for the whole church. This was two years into the turnaround and it gave a second burst of growth. Refocusing took six months to complete. We studied the history of the church, defined core values, mission, etc., and we acted on the changes that needed to be made as soon as we

could.” Even though this was quoted in Research Question 1, it is highly illustrative of pace, timing, intention, and obedience. The rate at which a church is willing to obey what it knows it should do is probably the secret motivational power of true buy-in.

Pastor PW-4 handled things by, “. . . *training the board. At the first meeting I began training and vision-casting regarding how the church could turn around. We needed the leadership to be in unity and on-board with the change that needed to be done.*” It

would seem that the pace in these successful turnarounds was determined by the buy-in and obedience of the congregation. The process was facilitated by good relationships and communication as it was taught and expected by pastors who kept the priorities in front of the people.

Research Question Four Summary

Infrastructure, polity, and administration are tools – means to an end, not ends in themselves, and they are the tools of leadership guided by vision and passion for ministry in obedience to the call of Jesus Christ. When churches get off mission, it seems that symptoms have a way of clogging, derailing, and even stalling the good and helpful functions of infrastructure, polity, and administration. SRDNELC churches that were found to turn around made continual adjustments to these areas as they rediscovered healthy dynamics in leadership, trained and raised up leaders, and learned how to be agile

and adaptive. These tools then served the church as it served God rather than any other permutation of this order.

In the small, rural congregations studied, relationships and communication were reported as keys to gaining influence, authority, and the buy-in of the church so that faith-based risks could be attempted. With growth, new means of attending to relationships and fostering continual formal and informal communication were adapted. Pastor PY-2 eloquently states, ***“If your goal is to turn around a small rural church, you are going to fail. God cares little about that. But, if your goal is to transform your small community with the power of the Gospel, you can succeed. God’s heart is not for a big church; his heart is for people. Big churches are a byproduct of loving people, not the goal.”*** To reiterate: God’s heart is for people. The small rural churches in this study decided to have God’s heart for people and used the power of relationships and communication to make that heart known. Layperson LY-2 sums it up, ***“The church is not about being comfortable, but about us reaching others.”***

These churches also found loving ways to address conflict and call people to accountability because health did not happen without accountability. These pastors consistently built trust and gained respect by their persistence, passion, and love for people. They showed that if a church really loves its people, the truth must be spoken in Christian love even if that truth is not what some people want to hear. The balance to this was that the pastors needed to be open, approachable, and humble, and this was a consistent description of these leaders by their laity. They showed the people how to behave in Christian and healthy ways.

Lastly, these churches focused on obedience and then took steps of faith that led to changes, but they took the time to help the congregation have buy-in and did not let egos drive the pace of change in the church.

Summary of Major Findings

Pastor, Congregation, and Community:



Figure 4.1 Relationship diagram in SRDNELC church turnaround.

In this chapter, the churches studied revealed some basics of SRDNELC church turnaround. In the figure (4.1) above, a very simple model is displayed which looks at the overlapping spheres of leadership in these turnarounds. Pastoral leadership and commitment to the vision and intentional mission of the church drives interaction in all of the overlaps. The Pastor encountered the challenges of the congregation but addressed them with vision and faith while being relationship-oriented and an example of hard

work. The pastor used every opportunity to recruit and develop leadership within the congregation while also working to increase the health of the church. Whereas, the congregation began to rediscover their God-given potential and the possibilities that they could not see before because their vision was on all their problems and lacks. The congregation began to believe and obey with faith-guided risks. They began to look at the community relationally from the lens of God's heart for the lost and unchurched and for the ways they could mutually work to make a better community. At the point of overlap with the congregation and the community, both sides began to rediscover positive regard for the other, relationships grew, and influence increased. Then, there was the overlap between the pastor and the community. The pastor made an active, missional, and love-driven decision to engage the community both relationally and pastorally. As these relationships improved, the intersection of the pastor, the church, and the community became the ground for expanding the kingdom of God. This is a vastly simplified model and likely there were fits and starts in each of the spheres. Some relationships were probably harder to encourage than others, but pacing and momentum were guided by pastoral and congregational care needs as well as reaching out to the community and meeting the needs of the community. Relationships in this interplay provided the needed feedback for discerning the pacing of change and the infrastructure adaptations the church needed to make. Momentum built as success and change improved the congregation's and the community's views of themselves and each other.

Early Focal Dynamics for SRDNELC Church Turnaround:

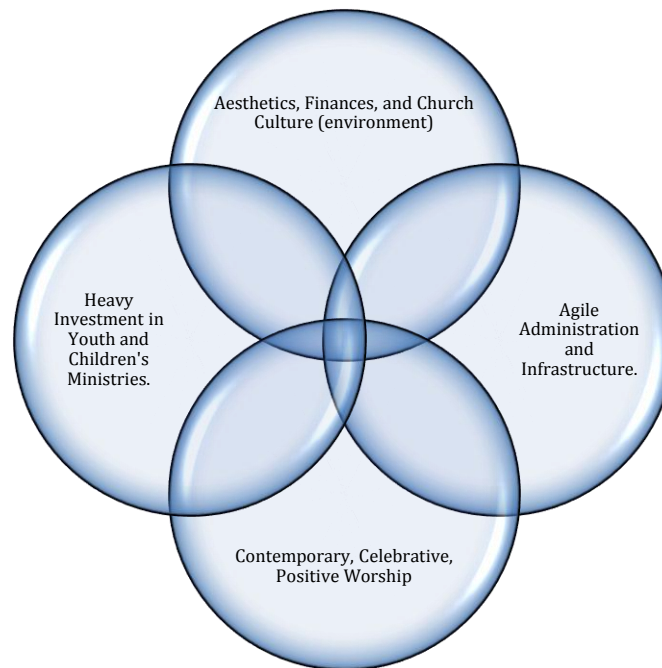


Figure 4.2: Dynamics observed in various issues, attitudes, and emphases that were reported by churches in this study.

SRDNELC churches had many challenges to overcome, but some were relatively common to all of them. These churches were in dire straits when the pastors began. Building issues and aesthetics often needed some level of overhaul while resources like money, workers, and hope were in short supply. These pastors found ways to creatively address these needs, and these congregations found hope and trust growing as the changes brought new perspectives and opportunities. Contemporizing and making the worship experience positive, while not without opposition, worked to coordinate with the aesthetic improvements to build momentum and make the church more guest-ready. A

culture of hospitality had to be encouraged and developed. Polity, administration, and infrastructure had to become agile and adaptive. The spheres of aesthetics, agile infrastructure, and celebrative worship were motivated, guided, and embraced by powerful, consistent communication and creative approaches. The other sphere, heavy investment in youth and children's ministries, was frequently a prime mover in helping the church minister to the community and to begin growing. Most of these churches made commitments to actions based on faith rather than on bank accounts. These actions interplayed to create the growing sphere of impact for the kingdom of God.

Pastoral Leadership

The approaches used by the pastors in this study have highlighted some key leadership dynamics that seem to be needed to lead a SRDNELC church turnaround.

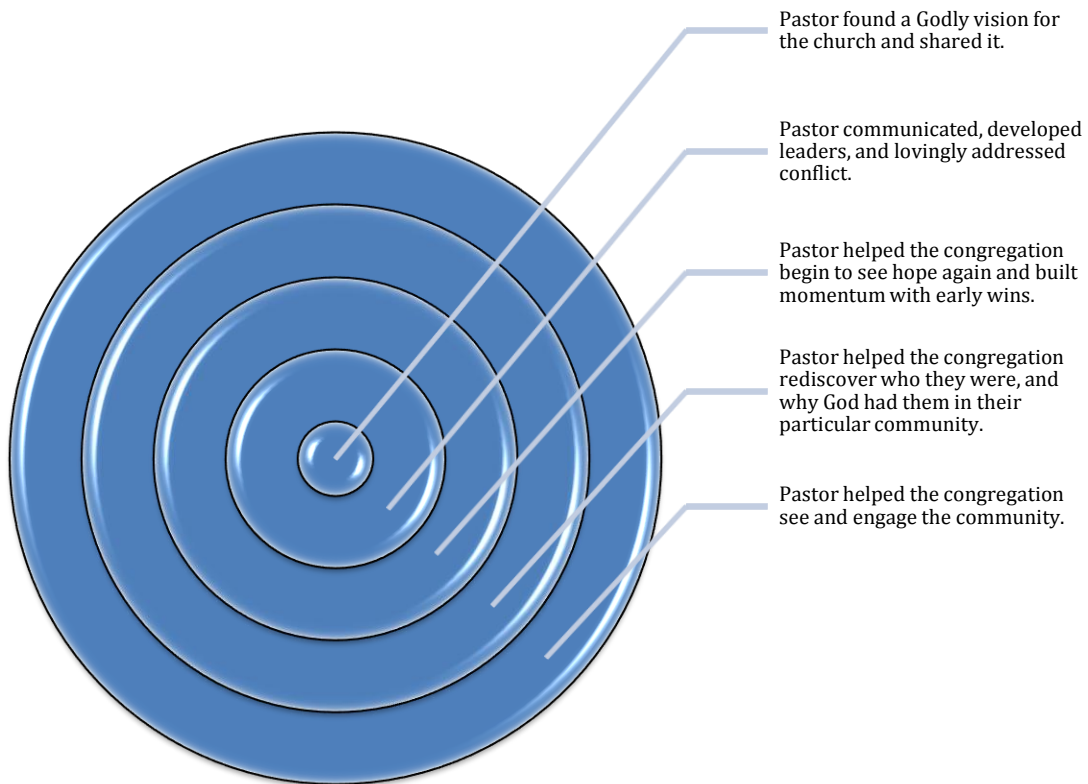


Figure 4.3 Pastoral Leadership Ripple Effect.

Pastoral leadership was shown to be key in the turnaround of these churches. This simple diagram fails to capture the time, patience, prayer, and likely frustration that were present as each leadership goal was consistently and often concurrently executed.

Without doubt, the pastors in this study accepted their calling to lead these churches and embraced the challenges with faith. Many of them did not go in with formal training for turnaround, but worked hard, found God's vision and taught it, developed themselves by reading, seminars, mentors, coaches, consultants, and peer interaction and accountability.

They did not exceed the pace of the buy-in of the church, though they may have creatively found ways to accelerate it by finding unique approaches to overcome obstacles. They remained focused on the vision and were always intentional.

Communication and conflict resolution were not haphazard but purposeful, relational, and courageous. Every positive step was a celebration; pastors led by encouragement, positive faith, and personal example. This increased the optimism, hope, and esteem of the congregation. The pastor taught the church who they were in Christ and why they existed. They rediscovered God's heart for lost people and changed the ways they viewed themselves and the community around them. And, they led the church by example in engaging the community in creative and effective ways. The community responded by seeing the pastor and the church in new ways and this helped bring turnaround.

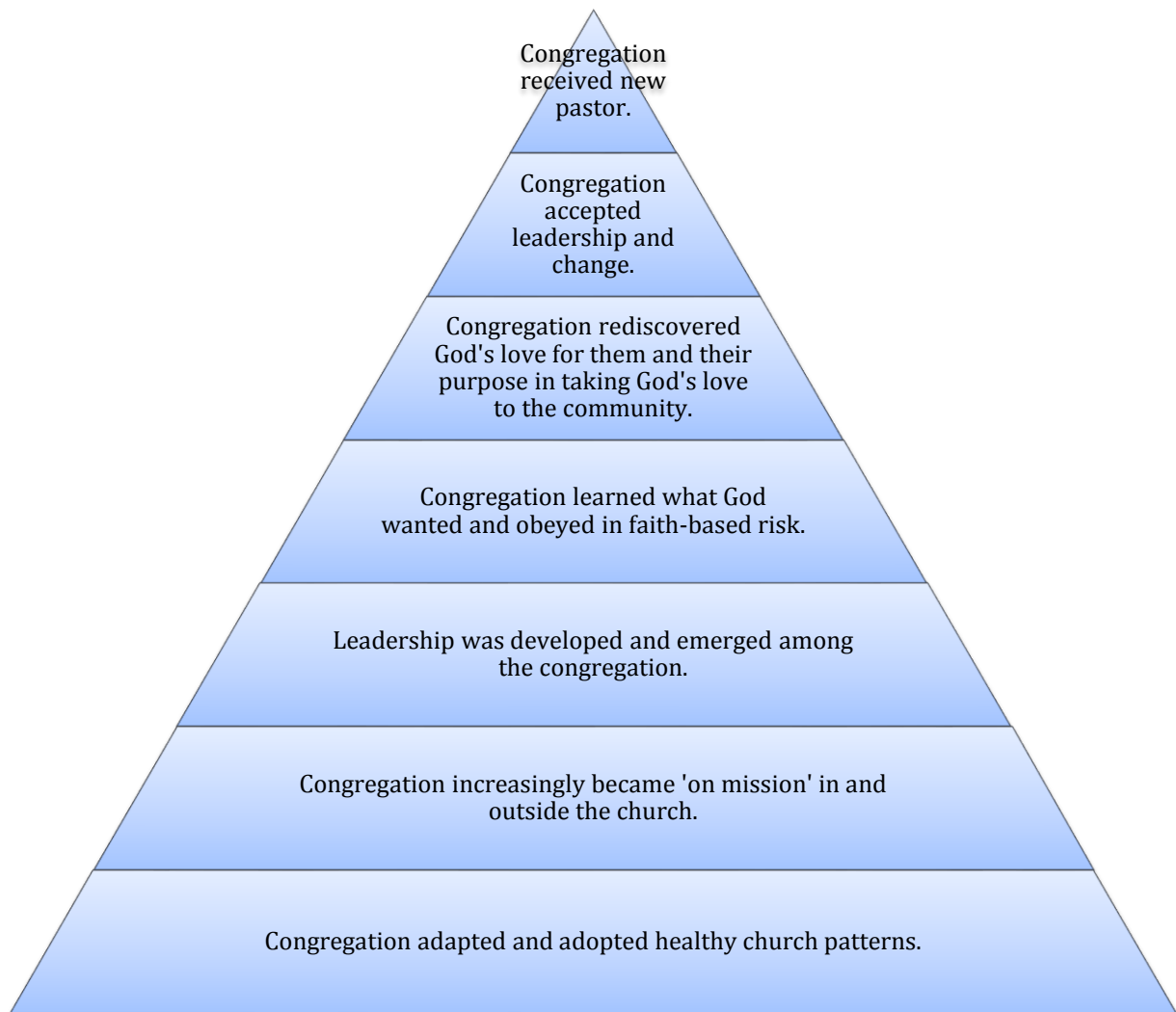
Congregational Transformation:

Figure 4.4 (From top down) Process of Congregational Transformation.

For some of these churches, the decision to stay open and try with yet another pastor was a sizeable step of faith. Some were helped to be ready for accepting a new

pastor by judicatory leadership. Some congregations had conflict, dysfunction, and direct opposition to the new pastoral leadership and that resistance had to be overcome to fully accept the new pastor and his or her leadership. The congregation had to decide to be teachable and to listen and respond to the vision and guidance of the pastor as she or he taught them to listen anew to God and look at things from a godly perspective of mission, purpose, and hope. They had to decide to accept the changes in the building, the culture of the church, and worship. Churches either decide themselves into life or decline, but turnaround churches decided for life. As the congregation rediscovered who God wanted them to be and what God wanted them to do, they embraced their mission to the community. The congregation had to decide to take faith-based risks in obedience to what they had learned God wanted from them. While all this was going on, leadership was raised up and developed among the congregation. This made the church not only agile and adaptive but intentionally missional. And as the church grew, the congregation continued to be teachable, to be faithful, to take faith-sized risks, and accept more changes. As the congregation transformed, it turned around as well.

Review of the Chapter

Chapter Four presented the summary of the recommendations for church turnaround that was described in the literature review from Chapter Two. Aside from reporting it, because it is the finding to be tested by comparison to the research gleaned from SRDNELC churches that turned around, nothing was utilized from it in Chapter Four. It will factor much more in Chapter Five. After that, the four research questions were explored by combing through the data gathered from the study churches:

- RQ #1: What are the leadership behaviors and competencies (self-reported) of the pastor and the church?
- RQ #2: What are the attitudes and postures of the congregation as relates to turnaround?
- RQ #3: What attitudes and actions made the church healthy and attractive?
- RQ #4: How and for what rationale was the church organized regarding infrastructure and administration so that growth was supported?

Summaries were given at the end of each research question segment, and major findings of the chapter were presented prior to this chapter review.

The findings of this dissertation will be analyzed and presented in Chapter Five.

Chapter 5

Learning Report for the Project

Overview of the Chapter

Chapter Five discusses four major findings surrounding SRDNELC churches by examining comparisons of the literature review prescriptions, the stories of actual churches studied, and a Biblical/theological evaluation. There is a macro-level overview of leader, church, and community and the way these interact to promote turnaround. Overcoming the prominent challenges that SRDNELC churches encounter early in their turnaround is covered in the second finding. A more focused examination of the pastoral leadership is the subject of the third finding. And an overview of the dynamics of the congregational transformation generalized sequence is discussed in the fourth finding. Following that, there is a discussion of ministry implications for SRDNELC churches and possible uses and benefits to other churches. A word regarding the limitations of this study follows. Since the sample size was very small, care was taken to promote heuristic humility and deductive discernment regarding generalizing this study beyond its scope. Surprising discoveries are reported and examined in the section on unexpected observations. An examination of possible future studies and uses of this project is presented followed by a review of the chapter and a personal postscript regarding the journey of this dissertation's author.

Major Findings

First Finding

Pastor, Congregation, & Community: Leadership, Vision, and Mission



Figure 5.1 Relationship diagram in SRDNELC church turnaround.

Finding number one serves as a macro view of what happened in the studied churches generally and as a macro confirmation of the principles of the literature's prescriptions regarding church turnaround. As the Biblical/theological model in the literature review suggested, and since there was congruence between the recommendations of the literature review and the local church data, the conclusion that leadership must emerge with a cogent vision for the future of the church was warranted. Such a vision must be faithful to the salvific arc of Scripture. The pastoral leader must be capable of both receiving training and of training the laity so that a rediscovery of purpose and mission embolden the church to move back into a posture of health and of zeal for bringing people to Christ; this is the ground from which fruitfulness springs. The pastor must consistently lead, model, and communicate healthy behaviors so that the people can

understand how to be the kind of church that God seeks. As there had been many seasons of poor spiritual health and inward focus in SRDNELC churches, consistent positive moves had to be made to get the church to cooperate with what God wants to do and in fact is already at work doing. Bold leadership was called for that is willing to lovingly, but unrelentingly, challenge sin and dysfunction while at the same time present a future with hope. Excitement and church buy-in were found to happen in increments as buildings were spruced up and as community events brought new faces to these churches.

The literature reported that in turnaround situations the pastoral leadership was crucial. The data supports that insofar as the pastors studied were frequently reported as exemplars, hard-working, good or even dynamic communicators, and that these pastors were deeply committed to the mission to which they were called by God, there was concord between the literature and the studied churches. Scripture certainly establishes that pastors (and others) are to be leaders of the church and to equip the laity for ministry. (Eph. 4:11-12). The pastors studied in this project were students of vision-casting and of understanding the rural mindset and the people and communities to which they were sent. In this way, they acted very much like a good missionary would. They learned the context and shared God's vision for that context while leading transformation in the church that increasingly led these churches to seek and save the lost. As they were doing this, they had to help the congregation understand and embrace the reality of where they really were in terms of their life as a church. Some of these churches already knew that they were on their last legs, and without doubt, in the cases reported there was often benefit derived from judicatory leadership and intervention. Sometimes outside experts were used to help people study and understand their reality. All of the above-mentioned actions were supported by both the literature and the churches studied. From a Biblical standpoint, conviction

of God's truth always precedes the necessary repentance and life-style changes that bring about fruitfulness. The need for conviction and subsequent change or obedience can be said to be true for both individual persons and for churches.

Jesus taught that it is important to count the cost, (Luke 14:28) and these pastors, proving the literature yet again, have helped their congregants understand both the cost of seeking to be on God's mission and the cost of giving up or just keeping things as they were. At the beginning these steps were often met with some level of inertial resistance, but through vision, relationships, communication, and much prayer and teaching, these pastors found ways to overcome and build unity around the renewed mission. They often had to get creative and always had to call upon the church to take faith-based risks. Through book and Bible studies, one-on-one relationships, and constant examples, they taught the churches that 'survival is not the mission of the church', and that as a church they should not settle for less than what God wants them to do. These churches reported that as the laity began to understand that church was not for the already churched as much as it was for reaching the unchurched, and they developed a passion to see the lost saved; this aligned the church with God's purposes and then positive things began to happen. Again, this finding is consistent with the literature and the Great Commission. (Matt. 28:16-20). Turnaround was found to be an organic process and this meant that the leaders had to constantly 'trim the sail' to catch the winds of God-directed change. The churches studied demonstrated that turnaround is not fast but requires patience, consistency, and constant creativity to keep moving forward in the will of God. As Phil Stevenson noted regarding 'success syndrome', "[d]on't mistakenly think that the thing that got you where you are is the thing that will get you to the next goal." (202-205). If we study the Book of Acts, we can see this particular dynamic play out in the ministries of the apostles. Peter had to change his

views on Gentiles (Acts 10), Paul couldn't go to Asia (Acts 16:6), and Phillip went wherever the Holy Spirit led him. (Acts 8:39).

As these churches learned to be governed by the will of the Holy Spirit, they came to love their community with the love of Christ; then the needs of the community began to matter to them in a new way. Creative ministries and responses were fashioned and the community became aware of the church, in some cases for the very first time, and they often came to see the church in a new and better light. The way that Jesus and the apostles went about healing the sick as they proclaimed the message of the Gospel is not too dissimilar to this need-meeting approach to ministry. Meeting the needs of people in loving ways often influenced the community to give credence to the church. When people in the community really knew that they mattered to the church, the church began to matter to them. Let it be noted that some of the churches studied began to involve the community before they were meeting their needs by inviting the community to invest in helping them fix their ailing facilities. In some cases, the reality that the community would and could care actually helped the laity begin to change and awaken to being a healthier church again. Often, the churches studied made an early commitment to making their facilities more attractive and guest-ready, and they also put a premium on ministering in quality ways to youth and children. Jesus did say to let the children come to him. (Luke 18:16). Abiding in Christ is the way a church is empowered to yield fruit. Fruitfulness flows from obedience that is manifested when a church embodies holy love guided by the Holy Spirit. When a church produces bad fruit, this contradicts the actual faithfulness of a church. God expects fruit from a church, and if a church is unfruitful for long enough, churches can and do die. Biblical fruitfulness for the church is counterintuitive in that multiplication does not happen first, but God's servants disperse into the world to harvest the fields, reclaiming people to make them the

new humanity of God. Fruit is the result of the Holy Spirit at work, but this often occurs in cooperation with human agency. Churches should take heart because Jesus wants to see churches restored to fruitfulness.

Second Finding

Early Focal Dynamics for SRDNELC Church Turnaround: Overcoming Challenges

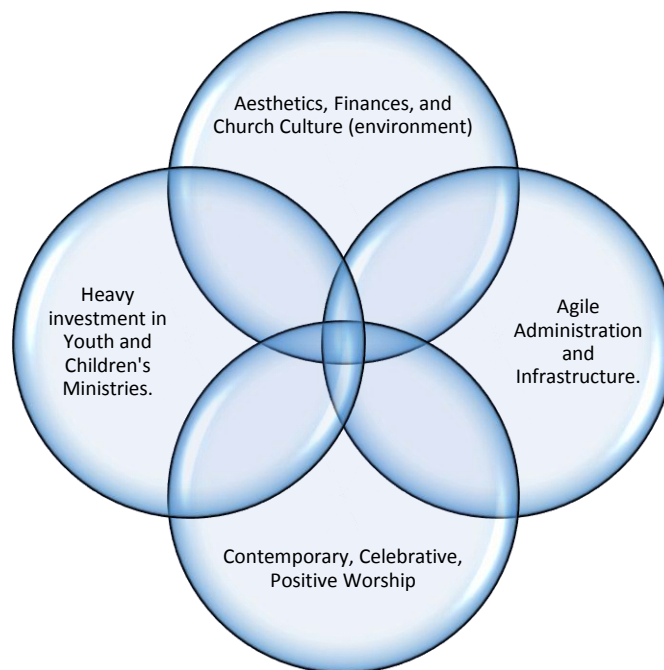


Figure 5.2: Dynamics observed in various issues, attitudes, and emphases that were reported by churches in this study.

Key ways a church becomes unhealthy that lead to plateauing and eventual death are: an inward focus, a self-serving nature, territorialism, power and control issues, passivity, disillusionment, a lack of clearly defined and owned purpose, lack of communicated and owned vision, division in the body, and open conflict that is not addressed properly. Sins in the church like grumbling, complaining, fighting, false teaching, selfishness, tolerating sin, failure to love

and more, promote church disease and eventual death. Repentance is likely needed as a first step in church turnaround.

Challenges to health, growth, and fruitfulness were frequently addressed in the literature and prescriptions often mirrored the need to address the same challenges SRDNELC churches reported. Pastors related that the church buildings were in poor or unsightly condition when they arrived and getting things repaired was a crucial early step in generating new positive attitudes, aesthetics, and an atmosphere of hope, energy, and excitement. Several authors addressed this challenge as a key to transformation. (Ramsden 11) (Eymann *Great Commission Research Journal*, 156-157) (Crandall 60-61) (Bickers 10). Moreover, these changes worked together such that the churches rediscovered who they were in Christ and from that moved increasingly into hospitable behaviors. “Relationships and harmony are keys to leading the small church.” (Ramsden 11). The findings of this dissertation indicate that the way a pastor builds interpersonal relationships in a SRDNELC church is probably one of the most important elements of her/his leadership.

Another early challenge these SRDNELC churches reported rather frequently was the need to contemporize and improve the quality of worship; the literature concurred on this point. (Haskins Abstract) (Montgomery 31-34). Numerous psalms from the Bible extol the value of lively praise and worship. People in United States culture are culturally accustomed to polished presentations and high quality music in their homes and in other settings. One parishioner (LW-1) shared that when her church lacked those qualities, it was embarrassing and visitors came only once. Most of the churches studied reported losing some people early on to issues like having a female pastor, not liking the new worship songs or styles, and persons being unwilling to change. In a few cases, persons needed to be brought into accountability for their attempts to control the

church or there were issues of long-standing actual control over the churches. This was not surprising for even the Apostle John had to call Diotrephes out before the church for his control issues. (3 John 1:9). Moses, too, had his critics like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. (Num. 16). High accountability, rooting out sin and dysfunction in the church, whether interpersonal or organizational, were issues the literature addressed for turnaround. (Stevenson 203) (Crandall 60-61) (Mann 38).

Recruiting workers and finding fiscal resources were regular challenges for these SRDNELC churches. They had to get creative and teach and engender a prayerful approach that people were willing to act upon in faith-based risk. Changes took time, communication, relationship building, studying God's word, praying, believing, hoping, dreaming, planning, and hard work. No church reported any short-cuts in these areas but what they did report was that when the people were properly and relationally prepared through constant and consistent communication things began to change for the better. Not surprisingly, as betterment came along, resources became available. Some found businesses and people outside the church to donate toward building improvements while others prayed hard and decided to obey even though they did not have the funds in the bank at that moment. Along the way, these challenges of money and worker shortages continued, but incremental improvements did come about. Scripture is replete with admonitions to trust God and to obey which are followed up by God coming through for His people every time. Obedience is a prerequisite for biblical faithfulness and fruitfulness. These churches were able to either have on hand or develop people who were committed and willing to step out, however haltingly at first, rather than resist. It is likely that the willingness and ability of at least a core group of congregants to be led and make changes is an essential factor in church turnaround. Church consultant John Laster indicated that without

such a core group, he hasn't seen a church turn around. (Laster conversation). Even in the challenge of finances and workers, the literature was in concurrence with the approaches these churches utilized.

A few churches in this study benefited from consultation, coaching, and/or mentoring to some extent or other. Those that did reported that this element was very helpful in getting the church to see a larger perspective and have confidence and some key tools to move forward. Church Y-2 stated that using a consultant at a later point in their transformation gave them a second leap forward. Consultation, coaching, and mentoring were recommended by the literature and were found helpful in these churches whether they were provided by the denomination or an outside consulting group. (Montgomery 31-34) (Stevenson 109). Proverbs teaches that success comes from many counselors. (Prov. 11:14).

One issue of particular interest was that of administration, polity, and adaptive agile organizational structures in these SRDNELC churches. Those with the greatest gains and transformation Y-2, Z-1, and W-4 reported that they transitioned from board-led churches to pastor-led churches who were accountable to the church board. There is not enough data to suggest or repudiate this as a preferable practice because this sample group is so small. Since the churches which demonstrated the largest results from transformation transitioned to a pastor-led model, there may be something to board-style restructuring worth further exploration. While Proverbs says to use many counselors, (Prov. 15:22) implicit in that statement is that there must be a decision-maker who determines which counsel to heed and which to ignore. In these churches, the pastor was the decision-maker, but she or he worked very hard to keep information and communication open so that people were able to support the vision and feel included in the decisions. Inclusion and careful communication likely helped minimize some of the potential

political snags that could have derailed turnaround efforts. Several authors in the literature did recommend minimal politics and streamlined chains of command. (Hunter 230-232) (Pappas 7-9) (Crandall 60-61). Findings from these churches seem to support that prescription of streamlining.

The literature has again been shown to prescribe the right principles, but the deft skill of these pastors demonstrated the finesse and leadership specifics that SRDNELC churches in particular need to consider. A study such as this one shares stories that relate what SRDNELC church turnaround can look like in real settings. Books can make a thing appear easy, and the principles in them can be sound, as was the case here but what they are unable to adequately express is the amount of patience and hard work turnaround will require in SRDNELC churches. One gap reported in the literature was that not much hope was given for SRDNELC churches. Given that it was quite a challenge to find churches that fit the parameters for inclusion in this study, indications were that while turnaround is a huge, huge challenge for SRDNELC churches, it is not a foregone conclusion that a church in such straits cannot turn around.

Third Finding

Pastoral Leadership: Close Up & General Process

The approaches used by the pastors in this study have highlighted some key leadership dynamics that seem to be needed to lead a SRDNELC church turnaround. Prayer, vision, communication, leadership development, accountability, momentum building and hope-shaping, rediscovery of a church's power and mission in Christ, and learning to really see and engage the community were key ways the pastors in this study led turnaround in their SRDNELC churches.

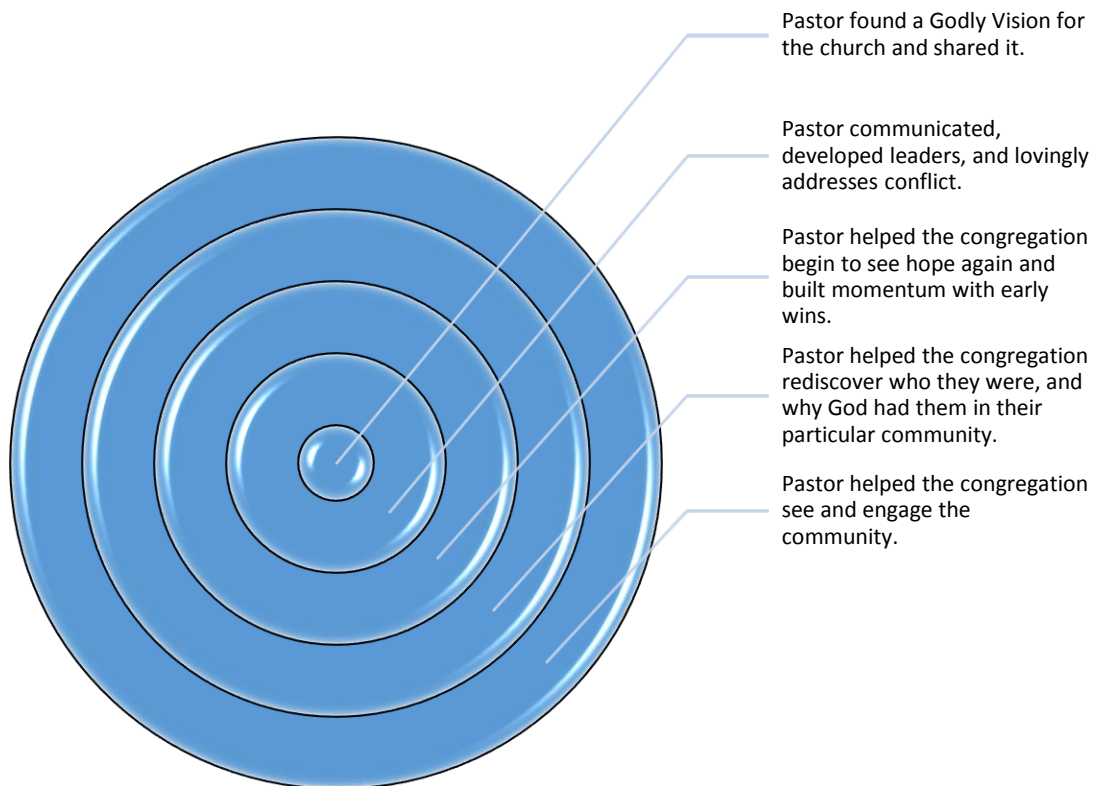


Figure 5.3 Pastoral Leadership Ripple Effect.

Pastoral leadership was shown to be key in the turnaround of these churches. The literature strongly commended the pastor's role in leading with vision. This simple diagram fails to capture the time, patience, prayer, and likely frustration that were present as each leadership goal was consistently and often concurrently executed. The literature frequently portrayed the clergy as the leader and change agent who, through strong pastoral leadership, a positive personality, good preaching skills, vision and strategic planning skills, accessibility to the congregation, and serving as an exemplar in faithfulness, led the church in imagining a new preferred future with hope. (Stetzer15) (Stevenson 202-205) (Haskins Abstract) (Bickers 10)

A supposition that emerged in the course of this dissertation was the notion that many churches, while being pragmatic and focusing on their limitations, frequently made decisions

that, instead of turning around, gave way into further decline and in some cases death. A new vision was required for a new direction, and in this study, that came with a new pastoral leader. The size of this study is too small to make any determination as to whether a new pastoral leader is always required, but it is at least suggestive that a new vision must come from someone. In order for this vision to accord with the culture of the rural community, the pastoral leader must also speak the language of the community well, finding ways to fit in and celebrate its unique qualities. (Keady Electronic) (McIntosh 7) (Samuelson Abstract) (Stetzer 15)

Without doubt, the pastors in this study accepted their calling to lead these churches and embraced their challenges with faith. Many of them did not go into the situation with formal training for turnaround but worked hard, found God's vision and taught it, and developed themselves through reading, seminars, mentors, coaches, consultants, peer interaction and accountability, and/or utilizing denominational aid. Additionally, there was the investment of time spent in prayer, Bible study, and building relationships with the people to whom they were sent. Vision, faith, risk, preparation, and cultural engagement are necessary elements of the missional enterprise of proclaiming the Gospel, making disciples and advancing the kingdom by the edification and deployment of the body of Christ, the church.

These pastors did not exceed the pace of the buy-in of the church though they may have creatively found ways to accelerate it by brainstorming unique approaches to overcome obstacles. The reason for their success likely laid in their work to communicate and develop those already in the church while being willing and aware that some might leave but not being held hostage to that challenge. Many times the willingness to adapt and change required a paradigmatic shift in the filters of perception. When a church has had a poor self-image and been in despair for a long time, it took a positive, hard-working leader to build consensus and

buy-in by continuous positive reframing of the issues and opportunities churches face. The specific approach of each pastor may have varied somewhat, but all of the pastors in this study have found new life for their churches. By leading as they did, they helped their churches decide to live instead of remaining as they were. They focused on the vision, were always intentional, and focused on opportunities instead of limitations. Resistance was usually encountered at some level or other, but these pastors led well by finding appropriate ways to address it.

Communication and conflict resolution were not haphazard but purposeful, relational, and courageous. Every positive step was a celebration. Pastors led by encouragement, positive faith, and personal example which increased the optimism, hope, and esteem of the congregation. Each pastor taught the church who they were in Christ and why they existed. The churches rediscovered God's heart for lost people and changed the ways they viewed themselves and the communities around them. The churches began to conform more and more to obedience to the Great Commission and this faithfulness yielded fruitfulness. Some of these churches, despite revitalization, are still small by common church size standards. "Faithfulness and fruitfulness are more Biblical measures for church health, not church size." (Stetzer *Outreach* July/Aug 2013). Pastors demonstrated faithfulness by leading the churches through their personal example in engaging the community in creative and effective ways. The communities responded by seeing the pastors and the churches in new ways and this helped bring turnaround.

In the metaphor of a fruitful field, theologically speaking, the things about the soil that hindered or prevented growth, health, and life had to be addressed in order to produce a bountiful harvest. SRDNELC church turnaround does not arrive through quick fixes but instead requires patient, persistent preparation, and care in season and out of season, but in due time, the work

will yield a harvest. (Gal. 6:9). That a harvest did come, because of the way these pastors and churches worked through challenges in faith, is a wonderful and welcome event.

Fourth Finding

Congregational Transformation: Process overview

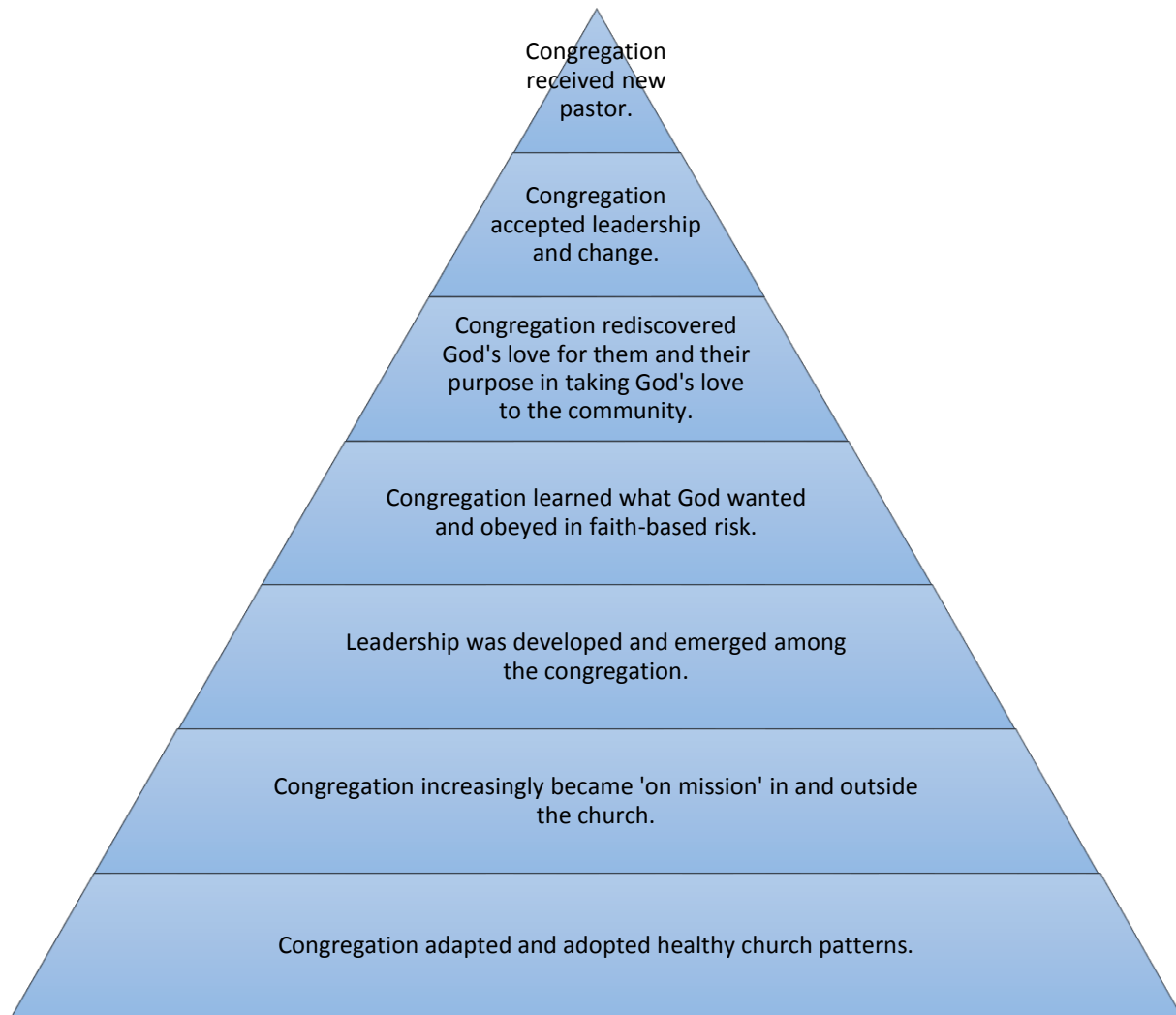


Figure 5.4 (From top down) Process of Congregational Transformation.

For some churches in this study, the decision to stay open and try with yet another pastor was a sizeable step of faith. Some were helped to be ready for accepting a new pastor by judicatory leadership. Some congregations had conflict, dysfunction, and direct opposition to the new pastoral leadership and that resistance had to be overcome to fully accept the new pastor and his or her leadership. The congregation had to decide to be teachable and to listen and respond to the vision and guidance of the pastor as she or he taught them to listen anew to God and look at things from a godly perspective of mission, purpose, and hope. They had to decide to accept the changes in the building, the culture of the church, and worship. As the congregations rediscovered who God wanted them to be and what God wanted them to do, they pursued the mission to reach their communities. The congregations had to decide to take faith-based risks in obedience to what they had learned God wanted from them. While all this was going on, leadership was raised up and developed among the congregation, making the church not only agile and adaptive but intentionally missional. As the church grew, the congregation continued to be teachable, to be faithful, to take faith-sized risks, and to accept more changes. As the congregations transformed, they turned around as well.

The literature did not explicitly provide the exact interpretation gleaned from looking at these churches with respect to the order of the process of transformation, but it would not prove hard to develop a process-path like the one in figure 5.4 (above) from the literature. Nevertheless, this process-path is consistent with the literature, showing again that the literature offers very useful principles which can work as they did in this study of SRDNELC churches. The question remains, though, whether merely reading the literature would generate the mosaic portrait the stories of these churches has yielded. What is reasonably clear is that the literature and the turnaround practices of these churches did not disagree in any significant way.

Theologically, the fruitfulness metaphor returns again as an apt way to look at the process-path. Some change broke up the ground of the church and, in this study, new leadership and new vision were the seeds of possibility. The fields had to be cultivated, stones of opposition removed, patches of dead soil needed to be fertilized, weeds must be removed, and the seedbed needed to carefully cultivate small harvests concurrently with working to prepare the field. Just as in planting a field, a great deal of work was done beneath the soil where most did not see the toil. One day, there were sprouts showing upon the cultivated ground. Farming is a strategic effort, as is church leadership, and it requires constant monitoring and actions undertaken with a consistent eye toward outcomes. (Hunter 230-232). After a time, the weeds had to be constantly checked, and the proper water, light, and pollinating agents did their work. Eventually, with great care and many synergies, the plants flowered and then yielded fruit. (Mann 38) (Stevenson 203). There was a lot of room for things to go wrong, yet as Proverbs 14:23 says, “All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.” Perhaps the difference between SRDNELC churches that turned around and those that fail to do so is that some are not doing the right work to bring fruitfulness. After all, the mission of the church is not merely survival but building the kingdom of Jesus Christ. (Montgomery 31-34).

Ministry Implications of the Findings

Given that the study found the literature’s prescriptions to be valid in these five SRDNELC churches, it is likely that a pastor or church desiring turnaround should pursue a solid understanding of the literature. It must be noted that the prescriptions denoted in this study were combed and combined from multiple sources. There was no single work among those sources that contained the overall strategy discovered by going through the corpus of literature. Also,

since the pastors in this study found it necessary to supplement their knowledge by reading, seminars, coaches, mentors, consultants, and/or denomination assistance, it is also likely that any pastor or church wanting to turn around should pursue outside help. Great benefit would likely be derived from a careful reading of the appendix (appendix F) containing the responses of these churches. There is tremendous insight to be found in their stories and portions of their individual stories might match elements of a church desiring turnaround. More benefit could be gleaned by a SRDNELC church that desires a turnaround by locating, interviewing, visiting, and learning from churches similar to themselves that have turned around. Pastors desiring to be turnaround leaders in SRDNELC churches would be wise to study leadership, conflict management, vision, communication, rural culture, and find coaches and/or mentors who can help them understand themselves and work on their leadership capacities. Judicatory leadership aiding in pastoral selection might find it helpful to study this dissertation for a snapshot of the turnaround process in these SRDNELC churches and then seek out or develop leadership training so that pastors and churches come together better equipped for the kinds of change that can lead to SRDNELC church turnaround. Churches that are searching for pastoral leadership would benefit from an understanding of both the kind of behaviors and qualities a turnaround pastoral leader in a SRDNELC church setting should look like and a deep understanding and ownership of the church's role in change and turnaround. Pastors and churches need to be able to clearly see their present reality and then seek for a vision that galvanizes the church patiently, positively, and passionately toward a preferred future. Any person or group seeking insight into SRDNELC churches could utilize this dissertation as a good beginning point for thinking about and understanding SRDNELC church turnaround. However, in a rural community, understanding the mentality, ideology, and values of the church and its surrounding community is extremely

important; no one principle is so valid, sound, or profound that it would yield good results apart from understanding, relationship building, leadership development, and constant positive communication. Also, any pastor or church must know that there are no fast fixes; many of these processes are actually spirals that advance a bit and then circle back through the other processes that together are building the forward momentum. So many pastors and churches want a straight line to success but fail to understand that organic institutional processes like the life of the church are far messier than can be described by simple models, and, therefore, require patience, repetition, and survivable failures that when learned from bring about a forward momentum, no matter how slight. Organic processes are cyclical, connected, harmonious, and either gradual or rapid depending on the stage of growth at that moment. Sometimes there are seasons of quiet and rest where it appears that nothing is happening, but in churches that turn around, energy is building in the understanding, spiritual formation, and commitment of the church.

Perhaps the greatest implication of this study is that if there is a will to turnaround, a will to seek God and step out, however little, and risk-taking by obedience, no church **MUST** decline and die. It is not likely to be easy, but it could happen. Transformation is always possible because nothing is impossible for God but there are costs that need to be counted and commitments that must be executed. Much hangs on the pastoral leadership, the commitment and leadership capacities of the congregation (their ability to be teachable if they are not already competent), and connecting these passionately in pursuing the will of God for that church's community.

Limitations of the Study

There are many limitations to this study. It was very challenging to find SRNDELIC churches that turned around through the channels available to the author. A few churches were

initially interested but backed out; others did not meet the delimitations, and the overall number was not large to begin with. Consequently, this study has an extremely small sample size. However, the sample size does allow the five churches to share more of their unique voices and phenomenological insights. With this small sample, it is difficult to generalize to any great degree of statistical certainty about what is needed for SRDNELC church turnaround. Even with that limitation, there is much valuable insight and wisdom to be found in these churches' experiences.

The study did not undertake a deep exploration of any one part of the turnaround process; instead it focused on the overarching principles of SRDNELC church turnaround. A study that focused on knowing more about the personalities of the pastoral leaders, the personalities of the church leaders, the conflicts and challenges and how they were overcome would be wonderful, but this could not be accomplished within the scope of this project.

The author was also limited by time, distance, funds, and other resources from looking for more churches, or traveling to visit these churches to mine the depths of wisdom these five churches might still have to offer.

Unexpected Observations

One surprise was that so many pastors entered these SRDNELC churches with little to no specific training for turning around these churches. A couple of the churches were teetering on the edge of deciding to close and some were experiencing turmoil and grief due to various traumatic situations. The surprise was that these pastors and churches found a way forward, learning as they went along but refusing to settle for what had always been done or even for what they thought was possible from what they could see in that moment. Another surprise was the overall relational nature of these pastoral leaders. Past exemplars of great leadership or fast-

growing churches had predisposed the author to expect turnaround leaders to be legendary and larger than life, but these pastors were shepherds, motivated by the desire to see people saved from sin and brought to new life in Christ. They were creative and did not let limitations set the agenda. They did not use any fast fix approaches but consistently led the church in prayer, Bible study, vision, and the Great Commission. This should not be a surprise, but, in an age where there is a how-to book for everything, it was surprising and refreshing to see that conforming to the biblical model of pastoring could still yield good, even remarkable, fruit despite being situated in old buildings, little old towns, and churches peopled with elder saints. Another happy surprise was that none of these five churches were subsidized by denominational or other church support. They found ways to turn around by relying on faith and obedience to God, passion for souls, and hard work.

Perhaps the greatest surprise was how early and considerably they chose to focus on children's and youth ministries despite having very few of either when they set forth. Ministry to these groups was prioritized and pursued with excellence and it seems to be one of the first main spurs to growth for these churches. The experience of the author is that the SRDNELC churches that the author has pastored put more of their energy into pastoral care and fellowship always with diminishing returns.

Future Directions for the Study

A longitudinal study of these churches would be a very interesting enterprise. They have begun anew well, but what does the future hold? What will happen when the pastoral leadership changes? What will happen when the core of lay leadership is eventually replaced by persons who never knew the days of amazing faith and great risk?

Research into the personality traits and leadership capacities of these pastors would be quite useful, though it would need to find a larger sample size to generate statistically significant traits. Studies of the way these churches operate and cooperate internally could also be valuable. Excitement when something is new and working is one thing but continual adaptation and course-correction are less thrilling but still very needed in order to continue vitalizing the church. What is the inner culture of these churches? What about them is different than SRDNELC churches that don't turn around? It would also be interesting to see at what point further consultation/coaching interventions are needed. As they grow, it would be valuable to study the dynamics in the churches as they hire more staff and still work to find volunteer leadership. Is there a cap on their growth because of where they are geographically?

Finally, it would be worthwhile to take the learnings of this study and apply them in a SRDNELC church that is in need of turnaround in order to field-test these findings.

Review of the Chapter

Finding that the SRDNELC churches studied did align with the prescriptions of the literature review, four major findings surrounding SRDNELC churches examined the comparisons of the literature review prescriptions, the findings from actual churches studied, and a Biblical/theological evaluation. There was a macro-level overview of leader, church, and community and the way these interacted to promote turnaround. Overcoming the prominent challenges that SRDNELC churches encounter early in their turnaround was covered in the second finding. A more focused examination of the pastoral leadership was the subject of the third finding. An overview of the dynamics of the congregational transformation generalized sequence was discussed in the fourth finding. Following that, there was a discussion of ministry

implications for SRDNELC churches stating that SRDNELC churches could benefit from this study. The limitations of this study discussed that the sample size was very small and, therefore, care should be observed when seeking generalizable attributes of turnaround that would apply to every SRDNELC church. The study provided insight, wisdom, and touch-points that might be common to other SRDNELC churches. Some surprises, like the pastors going into the churches without special training and an early intense focus on youth and children's ministries, was discussed. Some suggestions for future longitudinal or more focused pastor and church specific studies were made, ending with the recommendation that it would be intriguing and valuable to field-test the findings of this study in an actual SRDNELC church in need of turnaround.

Postscript

I started this study with a passion for finding turnaround for small, rural, declining, near end of life-cycle churches burning in my soul. I wanted to find ways to help SRDNELC churches find futures with hope or, if there was none to be had, I wanted them to know that and find graceful legacy options. Along the way, I've been stretched to think in new ways. I have realized that pragmatism, too often, keeps churches and pastors from looking for the possible because all they can see are limitations. Another revelation was discovering that churches decide themselves into decline and even death. I have sat in many meetings and probably even was the source of many pragmatic choices that cut this, stopped that, and counseled that we should only do what we could do. Until this study, I did not see that this perspectival tunnel was practically guaranteed to yield diminishing returns. This journey has taught me that risks are important, positivity is important, and churches need pastors not chaplains. Churches do not exist to merely survive but to seek and save that which is lost. I fear that in the past, I may not have been

enough of a pastoral leader who persisted in equipping the church for its works of ministry. Pastors have a calling to make people powerful. Powerfully alive in Christ, powerfully aflame with passion for the lost, and powerfully victorious in spiritual growth and an overcoming lifestyle -- this is a desirable church. This study has renewed my hope, overturned my fear that SRDNELC churches have no future, and realigned my understanding of success. Success is fruitfulness brought about by faithful obedience to the vision of what God wants to do in any community.

Appendix A:

Release of Information and Informed Consent:

Date

Dear _____

I am a Doctor of Ministry participant at Asbury Theological Seminary and I am conducting research on the topic of small, rural church turnaround. I would like to ask you for your help by answering some questions regarding the turnaround your church has experienced.

Thank you for your time and your submission of information regarding church turnaround. Please understand that the goal of this study is to find out what you and your church did to turnaround. The questions you will be asked have been carefully chosen to learn from you and your church. Please do not share information that identifies or damages the reputation of any person or organization. Your answers will be combined with the others from your church and reported without specifically naming you. The desire is to create a study that will help other churches. Please know that you can refuse to respond to any, or all of the questions on the survey. I realize that your participation is entirely voluntary and I appreciate your willingness to consider being part of the study. Feel free to call or write me at any time if you need any more information. My number is XXX-XXX-XXXX and my e-mail is REDACTED.

If you are willing to assist me in this study, please sign and date this letter below to indicate your voluntary participation. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Rev. Marcel Allen Lamb

I volunteer to participate in the study. I agree to have the information I provide used in the study as described above and so indicate by my signature below:

Your signature: _____

Date:_____ Please print your name:

Appendix B:

Letter to Judicatory Leaders:

Greetings! Thank you for earlier taking my call and indicating a willingness to help out with this study. As I said then, I am a Doctor of Ministry student at Asbury Theological Seminary studying turnaround strategies for small, rural, declining, near end of life-cycle churches. I am writing to you with the hope that you will identify and share with me the name of any church that has turned around in your region/district. If you could provide me with contact information for their District Superintendent, that would be helpful as I will contact them too. I also need the contact information for the pastor of such a church, as well as your permission to contact them.

Specifically, I am looking for churches that, before their turnaround: 1) have previously been under 40 in attendance (that had sustained plateau or decline for 4 or more years prior to turnaround), 2) are in a rural setting (roughly a general population less than 5,000 within 10 square miles), 3) are late in church life-cycle (generally more than 50 years of age), 4) it is likely that such churches were experiencing prolonged financial problems, 5) probably the church had a less than full-time pastor, and, 6) After their turnaround, such churches have a) over the last 5 or more years they have experienced growth in active attendance, b) have had a growing number of ministry/mission expressions, and c) reports persons being converted to Jesus Christ each year. These parameters are somewhat approximate and I would be willing to consider churches that have not hit every one of these criteria, as I know I am describing a church in very difficult straits.

I understand that identifying these churches that are under your purview will take some of your very valuable and limited time, but please understand that you will potentially be helping many other churches in the future by your actions now. Also, please let me know if you are someone who was very involved in the turnaround process (played a significant role in advising, directing, and monitoring the turnaround), for if you were, I would like to interview you regarding the turnaround process at the church(es) indicated.

In order to protect your confidentiality and that of those churches potentially to be studied I am required to ask you to read and sign the following confidentiality agreement.

As a leader in the Church I understand that I am selecting and providing information regarding (Churches/individuals) for use in a carefully confidential study regarding small, rural churches that have turned around from decline. I hereby affirm that I will not further divulge their participation to any other groups with regard to this

particular study. In other words, if asked whom I recommended, I will reply that, in the interests of confidentiality and protection of other's rights, that information is confidential. By so swearing, you are helping this study to serve the Church without putting respondents at undue risk of disclosure and potential harm. Please call NUMBER REDACTED if this confidentiality agreement is unclear to you, or you have other concerns.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Printed Name and Title:

Thank you and God bless you for your work!

Sincerely,
Rev. Marcel Allen Lamb

[REDACTED](#)

XXX-XXX-XXXX

Appendix C:

Pastoral Leader Questionnaire:

Name: _____

Age range: 20-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-60, 61-67, 68 and over.

Years in ministry: _____ Education range: Course of Study/correspondence training -- no college – some college no degree, college degree, grad studies to master’s degree, and greater than master’s degree studies. Are you Part-Time or Full-Time? _____

Gender: _____

Church name: _____

Church address: _____

Web page: _____ E-mail: _____

Phone: _____ fax: _____

Statistics for 5 years previous to Turnaround.

Worship attendance	Membership	Baptisms	Conversions	Income	Expenses

Statistics for 5 years after Turnaround.

Worship attendance	Membership	Baptisms	Conversions	Income	Expenses

2014 statistics.

Worship attendance	Membership	Baptisms	Conversions	Income	Expenses

QUESTIONNAIRE:

- 1) What teaching/coaching/training was given to you as pastor to equip you for leading a turnaround in this parish? List and explain: (include whether or not a

- coach or consultant was used.) If you used a coach or consultant, please share their advice and how it was or wasn't useful.
- 2) What training was given to the laity, by whom was the training given, and what was the purpose of that training?
 - 3) What were your greatest challenges in turning around? (For instance money, volunteers, time, resources, etc.,)
 - 4) What changed regarding church services and church programs? List and explain.
 - 5) Did you change the administrative structure? If so, how and why?
 - 6) What outreach and evangelism methods did you use?
 - 7) How did you strengthen relationships in the church while being open to newcomers and assimilating them into fellowship?
 - 8) Did your preaching and teaching change? If so, please describe, if not, please explain your style.
 - 9) How did you plan, measure, reflect, and practice accountability?
 - 10) What would you tell a struggling small, rural declining church if they were beginning to attempt turnaround?
 - 11) Are there any other insights you would share about turning around a small, rural declining church?

Appendix D:**Laity Essay Questionnaire Guide Sheet:**

Name: _____

Age range: 20-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-60, 61-67, 68 and over.

Years at church: _____ Education range: High school -- no college
– some college no degree, college degree, grad studies to master's degree, and greater
than master's degree studies.

How long have you embraced the Christian faith? 1-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-25, 25 or more.

Gender: _____

- 1) What skills and strengths in your pastor do you perceive as having been most helpful to the turnaround of your church? Why do you think so?
- 2) Did you participate in any specific training to help laity work through the turnaround process? Do you feel it helped? Why or why not?
- 3) What do you believe was the greatest challenge for your church to turnaround?
- 4) What do you feel was the most important change to turn things around? Why?
- 5) Describe the ways you observed the church take care of people already in the church? Describe the ways you observed the church reach out to people who were not part of the church?
- 6) What would you tell a struggling small, rural declining church if they were beginning to attempt turnaround?
- 7) Please share how you were involved personally in the turnaround?

Appendix E: Judicatory Leader Questionnaire:

Name: _____

Title: _____

Name of Church you are commenting on: _____

- 1) What teaching/coaching/training was given to the clergy to equip them for leading a turnaround in this parish? List and explain: (include whether or not a coach or consultant was used.)
- 2) What training was given to the laity and what was the purpose of that training.
- 3) What were their greatest challenges in turning around? (For instance money, volunteers, time, resources, etc.,)
- 4) What changed regarding church services and church programs? List and explain.
- 5) Did they change the administrative structure? If so, how and why?
- 6) What outreach and evangelism methods did they use? How do you feel that these methods worked out?
- 7) How did they strengthen relationships in the church while being open to newcomers and assimilating them into fellowship?
- 8) In what ways was your leadership used to help this turnaround?

Appendix F: Data Matrix

PASTORAL QUESTIONS:
<p>PSQ1) What teaching/coaching was given to you as a pastor to equip you for leading a turnaround in this parish? List and explain: (include whether or not a coach or consultant was used.) If you used a coach or consultant, please share their advice and how it was or wasn't useful.</p>
<p>PZ-1 Initially no training. Training and support came with a new DS. Church participated voluntarily in a consulting process with an out of denomination consultant. Reviewed historic patterns in the church, demographics, effectiveness/ineffectiveness of past/present ministries, and strengths and weaknesses of current church leadership and operations. This helped develop leaders and the pastor. Pastor continues developing with monthly calls to a ministry coach and district training.</p>
<p>PY-2 No coach or specific training. But not first church ever pastored, so pastor had a clear idea of how to lead and some steps the church needed to make to reach younger generations. After about 2 years, the church went through refocusing training. There was some coaching and training for the pastor. Pastor did a lot of reading. Most helpful were studies that compared rural and urban mindsets. This was very helpful when it came to initiating change in the church.</p>
<p>PY-2 Phone Interview: We did Refocusing, as a congregation, with probably 20 leaders that included (?), but then also included anyone that I felt was a key leader or who has potential to be a person of influence. We did, probably over six months, a complete and total history of the church, a complete and total core values statement. We looked at trends, we looked for what we are about, and if you are interested in some of that, if you go to our website and look up the church history, that church history is actually, you'll notice at the end it sort of drops off in 2005/2006 and gets really sort of brief after that point. But that initial church history, the extended version, is a direct response to, or direct result of the refocusing, and what we discovered...were several things within our DNA including the restorative nature of our church. Our church has a history of taking pastors who are broken and restoring them then sending them out. We found our core values that are listed on the website as well; things like the fact that we have a core value of grace, we have a core value of hard work, that we value people who work at church. We value that. We value children and teens (?) All those things came out of refocusing. What we also saw was a number of structural deficiencies that we had, primarily it had to do with the organizational structure. It would require..... Our basic structure at that point was that of a bicycle tire with all the spokes connected to me. So, we were able to carry out the whole thing, and I could talk too long, but it really reaffirmed the positives. We identified some of the negatives. It prepared us for the major building project that we had which followed within a year and a half of that. The sacrifice was in terms of time because for those six months we at least took a full Saturday, one full Saturday, with the entire team and it was a six hour Saturday that maybe we would have. We had that at least six times. Time is far more precious than money.</p>

PX-3 No coaching or training. Prior to current pastor's appointment, an interim was brought in to do a study on whether the church could stay open or should close.
PX-3 interview: The biggest thing for the process that helped them I guess – they were in very much of a financial crisis um, at least – well even before that and they basically, I think the DS basically told them, you know, unless you're willing to come up with a solution the option is obviously not one that everybody wanted to consider but in this process you need to come up with a solution that #1 you'll be able to afford a full time pastor and all that that entails and #2 to resolve some of the issues that happened in the recent past, and to begin to find light and move forward. So, that's exactly what they did and it challenged the people on the, in that process in the church, and I mean not the pastor, was kind of leading the process but it was the church members that were involved in the process and they came up with a solution. This is our plan, and we're going to make it work – and they did! So since then, we've had a sustained decent positive budget that it meets every year.
PW-4 Pastor had two great mentors when pastor entered ministry. Both taught about change in a church and how important vision casting is in order for the church to follow. Pastor also attended some conferences that helped with vision casting training.
PW-4 interview: Well I first started with my board, I cast a vision of what and where God was leading us with the church and how we had to change. They all knew by the time I got there, and by the time they hired me, that the church was a dying church and something needed to be done or they were going to close the doors. I told them that we first had to make the church guest ready before we could invite the guests, because the church literally was falling apart. I mean, it needed so much work physically before we could bring in people and tell them about things. I told them that when I looked into TOWN REDACTED itself where this church is, there was over NUMBER REDACTED people who live in TOWN REDACTED, and if you look at the neighborhood there is a lot of, I mean, there are different classes. The higher class, the middle class and the lower class, and if anybody from the middle class or the upper class were to come to the church and just step into the church, the first impression is to watch. If they were to first come to the campus and see what the campus looks like they are not going to come back again because their homes are beautiful and well taken care of, and so they are not going to want to bring their family into a setting where the place is falling apart. When I first got there they brought me on as an interim pastor and, you know, when you're an interim pastor you can't really do a lot of change because you're just there as interim pastor. So I came in as interim pastor in MONTH REDACTED and then they hired me in MONTH REDACTED and so it was only a couple months in interim before I became the pastor where I could actually do some changes. But, that gave me a time to love on the people and show them how I cared for them because they were grieving because they had lost a pastor that was there for NUMBER REDACTED years. And I, kind of like, was preaching on that; on the grief that they had, and on comforting them. When I became the pastor, you know, I started changing my sermons on the vision that God was leading us. I started the faith forward campaign that we are moving forward in the future and I tried to tell them what that would look like.

PV-5 None.
PSQ2:
2) What training was given to the laity, by whom was it given, and what was the purpose of that training?
PZ-1 Same training noted in PSQ1. Fostered and developed a sense of intentionality in every aspect of existence as a church. Opened spiritual eyes to potential despite perceived limitations.
PY-2 Much of main transition involved a large Adult SS class. Took class through a series of books over a few years. Purpose Driven Church. Experiencing God. The Church of the Irresistible influence. Took time going through the books. Focused on book and ministry of the church. With observations came changes. This training led to key steps of change. Every growth spurt required a huge step of faith. Training was being put into practice as it was being taught. Built the bridge as they crossed it. This made the teaching real and gave a sense of unity. People understood the changes because they were in the class and helped initiate the changes. With growth, called in a consultant with New Church Specialties and walked the church through refocusing. Each adult did a personal refocusing and the leadership team did one for the whole church. This was two years into the turnaround and it gave a second burst of growth. Refocusing took six months to complete. Studied history of the church, defined core values, mission, etc. Acted on the changes that needed to be made as soon as we could.
PX-3 No formal training has been given. However, the church is enrolled in future training through the district on vital churches
PW-4 Pastor started by training the board. At first meeting began training and vision casting regarding how the church could turn around. Needed leadership to be in unity and on board with the change that needed to be done. Board was excited about moving forward. Pastor began preaching about change and casting vision to the congregation. Church facility was in poor condition needing much work. Started casting vision for getting the church guest ready before guests arrived. Then worked on getting the church spiritually ready. Campaign was called Faith Forward.
PW-4 interview: I went to the board and once they were on board with the vision of, we need to move forward, we need to make the church guest ready first, before we can invite the guests to come into the place. So then I, kind of, did that at the platform where I talked to them about change and, you know, it was how change is hard but we need to move forward because that's where God is leading us, and there are places in the community where He wants us to be reaching out and bringing new people in, but we need to make the church guest ready, because there is a lot of things that need to be fixed up and worked on. Once we are guest ready, then we can invite those people into our church. So I, kind of, did that from the platform there. Every year when our conference is coming up I do a faith forward dinner and then I do a picture show of

what we've done throughout the year, ministry wise, salvations, and the things we've done in the church. We had, like, little pens on the tables that said faith forward and then I talked about moving forward and then we actually had our first work day to start on the process of building and a lot of volunteers came up and out and it was just so moving when we saw the change in the church and what it looked like. And then the next time we had one, a couple weeks later there were even more volunteers there and we, kind of, kept working at it even though in-between the days we were working on it every day. We had a bunch of volunteers that would help during the day, and we just kept working on redoing the church. And the more people saw visually of what was changing, the more excited people were, and the morale was getting higher. And then our first, we did an Easter egg hunt. They were used to, like, maybe 25 people would come and I was casting the vision of you know, we are going to be reaching the community here in TOWN REDACTED, and we expect that God's is going to bring us a lot of people in, and we will be reaching for Christ. And they couldn't visualize it; they thought I was crazy because I was making them get ready for a lot of people. And our first egg hunt we had 350 people there and then our egg hunt last year we had 650 people. So this year we are going to prep for even more. So, I mean, after that first egg hunt we had the morale was so high and they were so excited to see the church come alive again, because it wasn't alive for a long time before that. So it was things like that that really built the morale, and seeing the church change, you know, physically, and then seeing it change with people coming in and attendance getting higher. More people were coming in.

PV-5 Held an evangelism training with the laity.

PV-5 interview: We had a man come and put on a training session. It was an all-day thing, and, in which case, he taught them that they should use what they're doing – the things that they enjoy, the things that they like to do and use that as an avenue to reach others with the same passion. For example, if a person likes to fish then using fishing as a route to reach others in that same area. You meet someone on the bank fishing then use that as an opportunity to get involved in their lives with the goal of introducing Christ to others. Boy, I don't remember that term but it basically what it was was Friendship evangelism so yeah.

PSQ3: What were your greatest challenges in turning around?

PZ-1 Overcoming generational apathy that is embedded in the community, the economic deficit of the population base, lack of leadership candidates, church filled with new believers, and major facility space issues. With growth facility space was limiting and the work load became too much for a part time pastor.

PZ-1 interview: Okay um, the community is very economically deprived and sociologically deprived and the church had sat in the community forever but there was no real strong presence in the community. And a lot of the people came from disenchanting Catholicism and so God was far from them and they didn't feel he had a connection with them. Economically they had a lot of people who were in the poverty and low income was probably about the same as it is now which is \$23,000 per household and so people are just content to accept the way that things are and they don't think that their life could be any better and they don't think that they are valuable enough to have a nicer church or

for God to bless them and it's passed on from generation to generation. You know we always got by by the skin of our teeth and people live in houses that have been lived in for generations but there's no pride in them, just put another addition on the trailer. They are poverty stricken and not educationally motivated and, so that is a generational acceptance people have children young and they bring them into living on welfare and social assistance. That carried over into the church so 'no pastor, we like our little church just the way it is and we're not a big city so we're never going to have a lot of people and we're never going to have enough money to do things. So we'll just take the church with no frills'. We had nobody that was carrying on the pride of 'we are the church of God' and the pride that's supposed to come with representing Christ well, and being proud of the structure that we have. You know, we don't have any of that and we had to recreate some of that with the new DNA and the few people that were in the church didn't think that it could be any different because it had been that way for so long. In that, people in the community didn't think the church would be any different either. That was the other thing, the non-attenders.

PY-2 Greatest challenge was convincing the whole church to take steps of faith. There were skeptics. Did not have money, volunteers, resources, etc.,. Denomination was ready to close the church. If we failed, no one would be surprised, be we would know we gave it our all. People had to give up 'their' church. Everything changed. Core group had to willingly kill the old church, not just allow it. They gave up things they liked and had done for years. They gave up song they loved, some of the traditions they loved. They did this because they cared for lost people and they knew it wasn't their church. It was God's church. They made incredible sacrifices. The church turned around because the leaders really believe that people are lost without Jesus Christ. Desire to obey God led to the turnaround. They gave up all because Christ gave up all, and they are his body. Another lesser challenge was money. Church was not in debt, but had no money. This became an area of faith. If we truly sensed that God wanted us to do something we would walk forward, counting on him to provide. He did.

PY-2 interview: Well, first of all there is a need for a spirit of unity once you start that process. And part of the way that we facilitated that was these major decisions, even though we had official boards, and there were some committees, but not nearly as many as some institutions have, but we pretty much tore down those walls and included everybody in the decision making process. Secondly, we modeled an expectation of submitting a person's individual opinion to whatever God was doing. And by that I mean, there were times I did not get my way, but the expectation was that once a decision was made, there was just going to be unity behind that decision. The flip side was, these decisions were made gently and we gave people plenty of time to process. The way I would describe it is, we use agrarian language an awful lot. If you have an entire summer where things are growing, but nothing really seems to be happening, and then you have six weeks of mad dash harvest, and that really describes these cycles where we have this latent time where we are discussing these things and praying about these things and then as we get together in larger groups, ideas begin to come together and then there's this sense of God's direction. But, and this is very key, what we did next is we take a calculated baby step that is going to require the Lord's blessing. And that will be the final confirmation that this is what God wants us to do. For example, when it came to

building the building in YEAR REDACTED, we didn't get it built until YEAR REDACTED, but when we were making those decisions in YEAR REDACTED we came to the point where we just knew and believed that we needed to build a building. The idea of spending \$AMOUNT REDACTED in a town of 40 people was just not tenable, you know, it wasn't doable in a lot of people's minds. So what we did is we said, we believe this is going to cost \$AMOUNT REDACTED. We will not break ground until we have half in cash, 1/6th in pledges, and we're willing to borrow 1/3, so when we get to that point we will break ground and not until. And what that did, that provided for those who were truly anxious about the decision, that provided them a little bit of security in that they could support the project knowing that there were some safety mechanisms there. But then, once that decision was made we stuck to that. In our very first offering that we took we had better than 2/3rds come in. We ended up spending more and borrowed \$AMOUNT REDACTED. We were very gentle with those who disagree, but we expect them to surrender, and not to a personality, but to God's will. And so, other decisions, I felt in YEAR REDACTED that we should plant a church in TOWN REDACTED, and I shared that with the church and the overwhelming response was "no", and so I surrendered that and said "okay, we're not going to do it". So, I modeled that I didn't complain about it. I modeled that very same thing for the church that we're going to do this together, we're going to get a sense of this together, and a willingness to wait until there's some unity. But once there's unity, we work like crazy.

OTHER MATTERS TO OVERCOME: Because the way that the church services were; they were just a complete lid. The way that church was done was a huge impediment. A survey was needed to see what needed to be sacrificed. But, what we made sure of, and this is maybe part of what is behind your question, what needed to be clear; is that we were not interested in being a cool church. We were not interested in being modern. We were not trying to be contemporary, quote unquote, as an end in itself. Every decision we made had to be directly linked to our effectiveness. We did not change the music because we wanted to be cool. We changed the music because the music that we were singing was not conducive, it wasn't the style of music that unchurched people were used to. And then, to fan that into flame, as people came to Christ we would just celebrate that. And we celebrated a lot. I know I'm being a little vague here, and I'm trying to think of specific stories for you, but we would try to link some of these changes. Like all of a sudden, we had a youth group. We've never had a youth group. And I would just say, "You know, look at how these teens are responding to a church that's willing to reach out to them, is willing to have a service that's likeable by them. And being able to show them how these changes were about reaching lost people and not about being a cool church.

I believe frankly [a big obstacle] that these days the issue is apathy. There are some things like baseball and soccer and stuff that isn't connected with the school districts that really impede on us more and more. It's just, it's just even though things are going great here, people that are in their thirties with kids do not have the same, don't seem to have, I don't want to just lump the whole group, but there seems to be a cooling of concern about the spiritual development of their children so we, more and more, have to. . . we're trying harder and harder to find creative ways to teach the kids because the parents, for whatever reason. . . . We've had to move our youth group in TOWN REDACTED has had to move from Wednesday night to Sunday night simply because the dance studio would

not move to Sunday night and all of our girls are in dance. So they would... even the high school kids can take college classes on Wednesday night. And college classes and dance studio took our youth group of NUMBER REDACTED down to a youth group of NUMBER REDACTED over in TOWN REDACTED. Now we're back on Sunday night and we're running back in the NUMBER REDACTED over there. You sort of wonder was that...you sort of feel like you're at the bottom of the food chain. But that's not true of church, that's true of everybody.

PX-3 Money and attitude were major hurdles to overcome. Giving had declined due to a past pastoral change. Community is in a financially depressed area, which is a further challenge.

PW-4 Money, volunteers. Lots of work to do. Pastor and family involved in remodeling work. Most improvements to the building were donated. People got excited as improvements happened. Issues with previous pastoral family created about 5 months of discord and difficulty.

PV-5 Volunteers were hard to come by and the church had an attitude of failure and defeat. Finances were in difficulty because the church was in survival mode.

PV-5 interview: Um, well the big one with volunteers is trying to get them to see what they were doing as ministry. Instead of as something that just needed to be done. They, that whole mindset of 'how do you get a person who is never done something in the past motivated to the point where they are able to say this is more than just something that's got to be done this is actually ministry'? And once I saw that it or what we've done is basically just change their whole way of looking at it to the point that whether it's from the janitor to whatever that this is my ministry. I do this as unto the Lord. And that has happened, I mean the people's mindset seems to be more that it's ministry than just doing a task. Well basically what was happening people weren't happy, really, this is my assessment they hadn't been happy with what was happening around the church and there was no exuberance. So consequently a lot of times people vote with their wallets you know, and if they're not happy they don't give their money. So it's not something that they're, they've, it's almost like they were doing it subconsciously. The thing of turning the finances around in the church came down to once they got excited about the changes that were happening and that there was life in the church and growing they started supporting it. For example, we decided we were going to do a fundraising project to put a new roof on the church and the altar call area desperately needed it and it was in the past something like that would have never even been considered. We had the money raised in three weeks, a thousand dollars in 3 weeks to put a new roof on and it. You know the money, I guess what it was, is that the money was always there, it's just they needed to feel like there was something alive in the church to make it worth giving towards. Tithing; I don't know for sure, I personally don't want to know who in my church tithes and who doesn't. So I don't get involved in that angle of it but I have on occasion made mention of it and the treasurer assured me that most of the people in our church do tithe now. Whereas, before, very very small percentage that gave tithed, so that was a huge thing. The other side of that is that once they started giving, we took out a philosophy that if everything belongs to God then we can't out-give him, so we have started tithing the

second year that we were here. I challenged the people to tithe the church income. Whatever comes in tithes and offerings, whatever comes in, 10% of it goes to missions and that's the way it started. Well now we're, I don't know it's about 17-18% somewhere around in there, that every year we give on the tithe and then on top of that we support five missionary's families at a thousand dollars a year through big promise. So we do a very good job of supporting and giving it away. What God has blessed us with we give it away. We've never turned that around, it never stopped and we never looked back. So now every year, the Lord has continued to provide and we've continued to be able to do all kinds of different things. We pass everything on that God has given us.

PSQ4:

#4) What changed regarding church services and church programs? List and explain.

PZ-1 Focused on making worship experience more relational and family friendly. Guests received welcome gifts, but did not single them out in church. Hired a keyboard player to develop a worship team with more contemporary songs and multi-media. Replaced pews with chairs, making sanctuary a multi-purpose space. Welcomed outside groups to use building free of charge. Second service added. Banquet style worship services to honor firefighters, town government, food pantry volunteers, etc.,. Offer refreshments during worship service. Borrowed money to double facility size so that there is space for children and youth. Great intention was given to developing their reputation as an "outside the box" church that exists to benefit the community. If a ministry or program is not effective, change format or discontinue it. After building project no longer needed second service, so it was discontinued.

PZ-1 interview: Okay alright, we have a monthly cluster group with our DS the northern part of the zone, the southern part of the zone it is not mandatory to attend we are invited to come to a day of teaching they'll take you, they'll bring in speakers or sources outside of the district. But most often it's with the district superintendent and it's just solely teaching and training with them. Also, it is a time of team building where I would share what's going on in our part of the vineyard. We are required to give, what we call the dashboard indicators, we put our monthly Sunday morning attendance our average offering for the month, this month and then a year ago this month and we report salvations and baptisms and then we share the wins and perhaps sometimes the lows but predominantly it is a time brag and encourage each other. There's no throwing tomatoes at each other because they are doing better than you. And then we have the complete attention of the DS for that day from 9:00-3:00, and, we do some John Maxwell studies and stuff and we have a little bit of a study time. We've looked at Rohn material and different things that, **Who?** John Rohn? I think it was his first name is, we just say Rohn – R-O-H-N I think it was, he is a secular business man and you know, that is focused on the value of planning and organizing and being systematic which is something I know I have to work at because I'm very, very big on execution but strategies happen while I'm doing it um, kind of the part of the way I am and it always works out well so why mess with it? Yeah and my husband, you know, he laughs and jokes and he even mocks me sometimes because you know I'm changing the plan midstream because it needs to be done and it comes out better than I planned it so. So in reading the value of certainly working with my strengths but also looking for ways that I can enhance my strengths by some slight tweaks some, personality, uh I can't remember the name of the one of the

books that we looked at on strengths and it spoke about the value of working in your strengths rather than trying to change the things that you know you weren't good at but you know you need to improve them. And to not focus so much on trying to be someone I'm not but rather how can I surround myself with other people can maybe compliment my strengths and do other things to help me. And we do a lot of setting of goals and writing down goals and long term strategies in being held accountable. This month the DS will have us write down what we would like our average to be, or average attendance to be and what we would like our Easter attendance to be. He wants us to be thinking about that and operating each day doing things that will lend itself to that goal. Not one specific bit of information as far as assisting with that but a lot of things with anybody who's been successful in these situations has done a lot with their administrative and it's, you know, been good for me to know and track where we are. You know, year to date what our average is, and year to date what our offerings are, and how much per capita spending limit we have per person each month, and use that and put that into practice in the loop on that.

Our mission statement is to make more disciples through Jesus Christ.

I found help and even my assistant pastor and my leadership when we come up against a question about something, should we do something – we now have a Kung Fu class that has relocated to use our facilities twice a week and um, we weren't really interested in Kung Fu but it is getting people into our facility. And is it another means by which we can have spiritual contact with people to make more disciples. Shortly after the club moved you know, 9 of the members started coming to our church on a regular basis and they hadn't been connected with a church at all, so we evaluate everything, in respect to that.

PY-2 Music. Began by singing choruses and moved forward using overhead and hymnals. Made the screen palatable by showing scenes from local school sporting events before church. Enlisted teens to help with worship team. Did away with Sunday School opening. Stopped using denominational quarterlies. Have 3 adult classes. One for new Christians. One special interest class that went through a book study. And one verse by verse Bible study led by the pastor. Children's Sunday School curriculum is video driven. We try to make it exciting and active. Youth: for a time the church agreed to let the pastor act as if he was the youth minister. He began subbing at the high school and junior high to get to know students. Started movie nights and game nights. Then started a regular Wednesday night youth group. Made it loud, fun and intense. Used crazy group games, rock type worship music, and animated sermons. Sent youth to youth camp and made sure every kid had a paid way to go. Teens in rural settings have little to do, so it did not take a lot of bells and whistles to get them involved. Started using the teens in church and their parents would come and watch. This was a major driving force in the church's growth.

Sunday nights: stopped them. Added small groups, but not too structured. Had fellowship and some kind of Bible study. Sunday worship: used skits, videos, and object lessons all the time. Focus on action. Started doing major outreach events and special weekend services like Friend Days.

PY-2 interview: When I got here there was a guy in his eighties teaching a Nazarene or

Wesleyan quarterly. Some children's activities, but basically children cramped up in a small room, memorizing Bible verses and flannel-graphs. So what we did, we first of all, there were three adult classes and they were based on age. One of them was just never attended. They had the young adults class and the young adult teacher would be there, but would end up going in the adult class if no one was there. Then we had the senior adult class and they were using quarterlies and it was very, very traditional. What we did is, we eliminated that completely and just had one adult Sunday School class for the first two or three years. It was led by me. It went through books, "Experiencing God", several other books, we went through just for discussion purposes we went through "The Purpose Driven Church", we went through, I can't remember the guy's name that has a whole book written about bridges and how to build bridges to the community. It became a leadership training and some of the decisions that we made were discussed in that class. That sort of became the large group discussion thing. Then with the younger kids we began, we brought in televisions with VCRs at that point. Today every classroom has DVD capability, so video became a part of it, especially for the worship part, lively worship music for the kids during Sunday School, eventually Junior Church, but we left our denomination's work that they had, the publications that they had for kids, and we just went out and we ended up with "Project Orange". We tried "Faith Weaver". We tried two or three different things, but basically we just tried to breathe some fresh life into it so that it was exciting. We did away with the opening that had this opening where people would put money in the bank if it was their birthday. We completely did away with that. We brought in coffee and doughnuts. We made it a time of fellowship and teaching. I don't think what we did do was earth-shattering. I think it seemed earth-shattering because of how antiquated Sunday School was.

We rely heavily on public school teachers. I mean, our teachers, including my wife, who's a public school teacher, they helped with some curriculum stuff. It's a challenge. What worked 15 years ago doesn't work today. We struggle more and more getting parents to bring their kids to Sunday School. We're considering right now, we're considering eliminating our Sunday School hour which would be crazy, but replacing it with maybe a Wednesday night children's ministry or something because parents are just not bringing their kids. During that big turnaround time they were.

PX-3 Main focus was to emphasize worship, add contemporary music and increase utilization/involvement of the laity by identifying spiritual gifts.

PX-3 interview: Oh yeah, you know that was probably, gotta say probably more, I don't want to say accidental, but it was probably more – I haven't done a spiritual gift process in..., I was actually just talking about that, except for in my membership class I had this year. We had 11 people go through that and that was part of that process, which was very helpful, but you know, I have just always been, from my past in youth ministry I guess, effective in um, oh what's the word I'm looking for - seeing in people by getting to know people. Kind of trying to identify where I see their gifts and their positives and where they smile and shine when you say certain words and those kinds of things. You know, it's kind of like saying when you say you know, 'um helping our youth' or uh, 'boy the struggling youth today'. You just see that person go, you know something spoke to them. Yeah their passion, exactly. So I guess that's just kind of, maybe I'm naturally inclined

toward that way and working with people um, I've had people make comments that just, you know, but truthfully 'I don't know how pastor got me to do this but he did and,' there wasn't any animosity, but I have one gal that, you know, does my teaching children's time and she had said 'I never saw myself doing this, but you know, pastor asked me, and led me in that way and I love it!' So uh, so nothing I would dare to say nothing intentional, just who I am and how I lead people I guess.

You know I'm a believer in asking people face to face and involving them, it goes back to when I was – before I was called into ministry, well way before I was called into ministry. I just remember this one pastor coming to me one day and saying, you know, 'would you be willing to read scripture in worship? I think that you would do well in that area' or something like that and I was like, believe it or not that was the furthest thing from my mind and I really didn't. I mean I liked to do stuff with music, I have always been because, you know, I play and sing, so let me stand up and sing and play guitar – I'll do that all day long, but now you want me to do something in this area? And, you know, if he would have never asked, I would have never said yes.

I don't like clipboards in church I don't like, you know, here's a signup sheet. You know, I encourage all of my people because you can read people that way, number one, because when you ask, they tell you a lot by their response and expression and those types of things. And then it also adds value to who they are because what I saw was 'this person saw something in me that I didn't see' and there was a value in that. I think that was probably the biggest way of that process. I just have a lot to learn. I'm a doer so that is my challenge. As much as I love to ask people, I am able to inspire people to want to be a part of the ministry of Christ, I feel, um I'm a doer too, and um, so that's my downfall and uh, being able to encourage and grow lay people is just an area that I kind of am looking to kind of get better at and pursue.

PW-4 Structure was added to the services. Worship was changed to have structure. Put an attendance sheet in the bulletin and had people write out prayer requests instead of sharing them in worship. Started taking up an offering as part of service instead of using a box. Blended worship with hymns and worship songs. Worship teams. New ministries: Nursery, pre-school, Jr. Church. Adult Bible study on Wednesday night. Kid's club on Wednesday nights, and then added a youth group. Got leaders by calling and talking to them. Held training session and cast vision for the ministries.

PV-5 First year, the focus was on healing. The second year the focus was on getting the people to take pride in their church and do repairs. Programs that weren't working or were poorly staffed were dropped on the premise of doing one or two things well versus 10 things poorly.

PSQ5) Did you change the administrative structure? If so, how and why?

PZ-1 There was not much structure to change. Church is pastor led with an advisory committee. Consultant process recommended addition of an Administrative assistant. Changes came through developing ownership and leadership in the people. Developed administrative skills by reading, District training (Success University) and by drawing the leadership and congregation's attention to attendance and financial patterns. Small

church decided to operate with a large church mindset. Track what we do and only invest in what is effective in fulfilling our mission.
PY-2 Before arrival, the church was run in a good way by the pastor and a matriarch. When new pastor came, a board began to lead. Pastor worked to become the leader. Board became a team dedicated to our goals. Pastor was careful to include them, but was making many of the key decisions. In short, they became more of a staff led church.
PX-3 Only corrections to bring procedures into proper form.
PW-4 Made the board structure use less members. Put a trustee board in place. Created a nominating committee. Started having board meetings every month instead of once or twice a year. Added leadership training at each meeting.
PV-5 Structure remained the same. Divisive leaders were eased out.
PSQ6) What outreach and evangelism methods did you use?
PZ-1 We operate a very successful food pantry that connects the pastor with the majority of families in the community. Summer feeding program (government funded program using church facility) provide lunches for children in community. Viewed as the town pastor. Hired non-attending, qualified individuals from the community to assist with Sunday morning. Many of them have become regular church attenders. Joined the Rotary club.
PZ-1 interview: Yes I will, when we, built the addition. Prior to that the children waited in the worship area while service was going on in the seats with their parents. They did their crafts and that in the pews because there was nowhere else for them to go. We were in the church and so if they needed a crayon or had a questions about the craft they would ask me and I'd come down off the platform and assist them and then resume preaching and so it was really kind of getting so it was a big thing to have in the middle of the area. We didn't have anybody in the church that was a trained or qualified or remotely knew how to work with children or wanted to work with children, because if anybody was coming to the church wanted to come to church for themselves. They were spiritually hungry so I was praying about it because my husband can't do any more or else he is going to kill somebody, you know, he's a good guy and we have fun with kids but that's not his gifting so the Lord kind of, put it upon my heart to learn what were the criteria I needed someone to basically supervise children. I did the Bible part I told the story, I did everything and I made up the lesson. I just needed somebody to supervise the kids while they did the crafts and make sure they didn't kill each other. So I thought well, there's people in our community that have in-home daycares, that are teacher's aids, or that have four or five kids and don't go to church. So I literally approached a gal who had four children at one of our food pantry distributions, and I have enough contact with her to know that she had a daycare. I have a good acceptance so I had some criteria, they couldn't go to church anywhere else, but they had to have experience with kids and they needed the money and so I thought if I had to pay \$20 out of my own pocket I will do that because I have children, my own children to want looked after. So it was valuable enough to me but I say we will take it out of the church budget and the church, I just said

this is what we're doing and the church is always okay with that but I knew if we came up short I would pay the difference. So I approached this gal and she was thinking about connecting back to church, she used to go years ago when she was younger but had just gotten away from it. "I think I would like to come and do that." And so I connected with another person and another gal and so we had two gals in this one particular, the first gal said 'hey is it okay that I come to church when I'm not working?' I said certainly, and then she got saved and then she got baptized and that was kind of the formula that we used. I keep the feelers open for individuals that are in those types of criteria. We have used a couple people that went to other churches and they would come to our church and then go to their church. That hasn't been the best method because obviously if they are connected elsewhere you want them to be fully connected. But they've met two out of the three and you know, they could use the finances and they were good with kids. The pattern kind of contradicted the mindset that churches want to take from you. One particular gal, well all the gals, would say 'you know that \$20 means a lot, you know, \$20 for an hours work that would help with their gas, groceries, and it brought all the families to church and most of them have gotten saved and baptized and have stayed on. You know even if they haven't continued with the children's thing they've stayed on and that's kind of the approach that we've taken because we believe that people are gifted from God and we can train them to be spiritual leaders but if they have innate things that are from God already, we want to use those much like we would hire a painter or a plumber or a contractor to do other work. Um we do it the same way and that way we have more control over what we expect of them. You know if they're not showing up, or if they are late, or if they aren't following through on the lesson plan we can say you know, if this isn't working for you it isn't working for us. And we had one gal that we had to do that, she wasn't showing up and she had some difficulties going and we, kind of had a plan to fix things and we just took her off the rotation. And then she just didn't show up, so she didn't know, and then one day she reached out and we were like 'well, we've kind of moved on from that' and there's a little bit more of a professional aspect to it, and it's worked well for us. And we budget that \$20 we had a couple do it and won't take the money and they just put the money back in the plate. But it has worked well in developing and valuing people that aren't saved and aren't part of a church anywhere.

PY-2 We used a number of them. Each program or event in and of themselves were not as important as the fact that they were intentionally done to reach out. Friend Days, Fall Round Ups with hay rides. BBQ lunches, back to school parties, school is over parties, summer picnics, pool parties, bonfires, western days, etc.,. We had special children's programs on the weekends like a puppeteer doing a service. Youth Sundays with rock and roll teen focused sermons. Events in the community that were open to all and resembled a carnival setting. Handed out free water at these events. Kids free activities with prizes. We did not do these as fundraisers, we gave everything away for free. Heavily invest in VBS and make it so incredible that kids want to be there. Pastor attended every junior and senior high sporting event he could.

PY-2 interview: What I'm trying to get at there is that if the people of the church are truly interested in reaching their neighbors for Jesus, getting them into church, they're excited about the church, they believe that their neighbor will like the church, they believe that eternity's at stake; all those type of things, if you have people like that when

you do an event what you are doing for them is you are giving them a tool to reach their neighbors. So it isn't the church specifically, it isn't just that the church is doing something, it's that you have people that want to get their neighbors in. And so, if we have a friend, and if we're going to have..... Merle Haggard's son sing here one time. We had just crazy stuff. We had what we call the world's largest banana split one time. We took a huge piece of PVC pipe, like 40 feet long, and filled it with bananas and ice cream and everyone ate it back in the days before we worried about germs. But whatever you're doing, you're making sure you're helping the people who want to get people in the church. And then when you get there here you make sure that everyone that knows them has an explanation of the gospel. But the thing that makes that work isn't how awesome this event is, what makes it work is that you have people who truly to lead people to Christ, who truly want their neighbors to come to church and you're giving them a tool to do that. Does that make sense?

PX-3 Using a free store, we focused on a more direct approach to the community. It was important to meet and talk to the needy in the county. Brought in special music to attract believers and non-believers alike. Revived community outdoor worship and the VBS program.

PX-3 interview: Well I think our biggest challenge we have here to channel to those we have who are needy is our-the free store. I don't know if you're familiar with that, it's similar to the free store down in Port Huron but, that is our biggest channel in outreach. There are other things like our UMW is very active in doing that through things that they make and different stuff with missions. But really the free store has been a huge place in the community and, when I got here, how it all came together it kind of alienated one of the churches. So I had to do some kind of repair you know, in that area to kind of bring the mission to light again and to bring the body of Christ to the church as opposed to the 'oh they started this and we were offended because they didn't ask us' you know that kind of thing. So I basically, uniting that ministry with the church again and, so we've accomplished that in that process or in the midst of accomplishment I should say, but in that process we began to look at ways of how we can better connect with those people that come into the store. Not just here they come to get some stuff and they leave, and we've got a long way to go in this area but how can we better connect to the people that walk in in our conversation. In our wanting to, I have key people in the leadership next door – a couple that are very giving in the area of being listeners. You know they love Christ and they just want to share that love with people but they are very good listeners. So we've been able to connect to some very needy people in a way I think that's more than just a great ministry in that church. We've done that through, we have a prayer box set up in the church so that those that come in are able to leave those prayer requests and things that they might have then we pray for them as a group each week when we meet as staff over there. Then I, or someone else, will generally send a note if they give us that information just to let you know that you've been prayed for today and those kinds of things. We've also done some stuff, some work with some free soup suppers. We've done some of those in the winter over here, or soup luncheons I guess you want to call them. So we are trying to, the goal is to try and make the space more of a creative space for the spirit to intervene in the lives of people besides just giving them clothes and just giving them food, you know. Giving them hope in the process.

PW-4 Do outreach every other month and in house relationship building every opposite month. Big events like community egg hunt, trunk or treat, live nativity. Events draw people to the campus. We are building a good reputation in the community. We also do off campus free events like face painting at the fair.
PV-5 Canvassed neighborhoods with invitation to special events and capitalized on small community's desire to help each other out. Became chaplain and fire dept. and got to know them. After 7 years, community people refer to pastor as their pastor whether or not they attend the church. Used friendship evangelism to lead people to Christ.
PSQ7) How did you strengthen relationships in the church while being open to newcomers and assimilating them into fellowship?
PZ-1 Always keep the ship moving. Remind people that the church does not exist for those already attending, but for those who have yet to enter the doors. Pastor developed a rapport with congregation and give them reason to trust leadership. People focused pastor. Intentionally look for opportunities to develop a people focus in each person who comes in the door. Great intention given to keep any one group or person from having "power".
<p>PZ-1 interview: Um, it's not above me to, either in times past, be preaching or needing to be able to worship, or something and to lead the front of the church and go back and greet somebody who comes in either that I know, or somebody that's new, and bring them a bulletin. And we get gifts, a welcome gift when people come. I make it a point of talking to the people and asking them their name, should I not know it. But I'm known in the area, many, most times, anybody who comes does not just come as a completely cold contact. They've come to a wedding, or a funeral, or a neighbor, or something that can be connected with me, so I always make a point of connecting with them and greeting with them and saying hey to them. And having my people see that, and in turn encouraging them to do that when someone comes in during what we call intermission time. We have intermission just before the message and after the worship. We encourage people to get a cup of coffee and a donut, and to visit with people. So we focus on that, we don't have reserved seating and we try to avoid anything that sets up status of any one people and grouping of more value in the church. We always try to be plainly clear about the church statement so that we don't leave people out. Like when we have community, we make it good and clear that we practice open communion with grape juice and bread. You are welcome to participate if you are from another, faith or church or practice.</p> <p>I am a very people oriented person and I pay attention to details and I know stuff about people and I can easily interact with people and communicate with them. And I have a strong intuition of how people are feeling and sometimes, as soon as I'm done preaching and I say amen, I come down to a person and say 'let's go to my office, do you want to get saved?' and they're like 'I can't wait' you know so.</p>
PY-2 We had to open our arms or everything would not work. This was not a program,

it was an attitude. We included people in decisions, asked them to help us with all these new things we were doing. We allowed new people to start new ministries and lead them, if they were growing in their faith. At one point expanded the size of the leadership board so some newer people could be on the board. To do all this we had to be willing to surrender the control of the church to God.

PX-3 Pastor took the approach of being particularly personable and sought out key influencers in the church. This was to discover current stumbling blocks and how to resolve them. The church has a strong sense of welcoming and the people gladly invite new persons into church ministries.

PX-3 interview: I think as far as Christian identity, it's helping people to discover who they are in Christ and you know, where he has gifted them. Well, of course, first it's how much they're loved, no matter where they are at in their life or walk and I think that helping them identify those things first comes obviously through relationship with others – through connection with the community. The beginning process is just being a part of that worship, but I think connecting them with the community and the small groups so that their identity becomes 'I'm a part of this community, I'm not just so and so'.

I guess it reminds me of a story, and I can't remember what book I read it in, but it talks about this gentleman who saw a need in a young boy. They lived in the mountains and it was cold and he knew of this young boy in the community that didn't have a coat, and the man who noticed him happened to be a tailor and so he knew people well and he knew by looking at them what size they were and all these things. But he recognized this need in this young man, but he knew that if he went to this young man and said 'here I have a coat for you' um, 'would you take it?' that he probably wouldn't. Um for whatever reason, you know you're giving it to me because I look like I'm in need or whatever I mean who knows. And so he says, in his thought, he says there has to be a better way to help meet this need without, discouraging the spirit at the same time. So, what he does is, he sizes up the individual. And so he says I know what size he is, so he makes this coat and he puts this coat in his backpack and he is walking around and one day begins a conversation. Anyway, he says, 'I wonder if you could do me a favor, I have this backpack that is really weighing me down and it's getting hard to carry, and in it I have a coat and it's taking up the space that is burdening me at this point. You know, I was wondering if you would take this for me and help me with this?' And so, of course, the young man takes the coat and you know, and I'm probably not telling the story exactly how it should be. Yep, yeah and I use that story with my free store leader you know, sometimes if someone were to come up to me and say 'you know, NAME REDACTED I see this area in your life and you're a sinner and you know you're weak or whatever'. Of course we would be turned off and pushed away but when somebody offers love in a way that is not you know, that is has the ability to be received.

PW-4 Social events in the church every other month to build relationships. Sweetheart banquet, Thanksgiving banquet, church picnic, etc... Also get people involved in outreach events to build relationship and community within the church.

PW-4 interview: Well, we started with greeters, and it was important that when people come they feel welcome. You know how important first impressions are and they, within 30 seconds of coming into the church are either going to come back or not come back. So

I placed greeters at the door to greet people as they are coming in to make them feel welcome and we have a welcome packet that we give to them. And then from the greeters – the greeters are kind of supposed to direct them into where they need to go. Or if they have children, show them where the kids have to go, we have ushers also. I did usher training and greeter training, assimilation type training for all of them so they knew how to be welcoming and show somebody that they really care about them, and show them the love of Christ. Also, then after the service, strategically, they are supposed to go so they get greeted afterwards also, because a lot of times they get greeted when they come in but not afterwards. I try to stay in the back and welcome everybody and when they leave. But, you know how it is, people get past you and you don't get to see everybody, so that's why I have other people that make sure that we welcome them. We have, what we did was, in our fellowship hall -- it is too small to fellowship in, so we actually make it a café now. DONOR REDACTED actually donated all their tables and chairs to us and so we made it into a café. We have coffee and donuts and snacks foods. So, as soon as they come in they are told 'hey, get a cup of coffee, get something to eat' and people who are in there start fellowshiping with them right away. Then after church people hang out afterwards, you know the same thing. That has been becoming a connection there, and then I try to send off a letter – a first time guest letter to them thanking them for coming and stuff. And then plugging them in, we have a Thursday night right now, we don't have small groups but we are trying to get them up and running pretty soon, but we do a Thursday night Bible study for adults when we try to get them plugged in to the adult Bible study or we have kids club or youth group on a Thursday night. In fact, we got our, our adult class was so large we had to leave our adult classroom and we are doing it in the fellowship hall because there are too many adults in it. But I think the next step is, we need to do smaller groups in a small group setting so we are working on that right now. Plugged into ministry, you know I want them to be there for a little while before you put them in any type of children's ministry. My thing that I do at the church is, every other month, I do outreach and then the opposite month I do in-reach with it. New relationship building-type programs so the outreach we do the light activity, and this year we added in one night in Bethlehem and so those type of things. I plug new people in right away because they don't have to have; they can stand to give out prizes or whatever, and so I do plug them in right away to those types of ministries. Then the in-reach type of relational building, is sometimes either a banquet or something like we will have a baptism and then we have a dinner or something afterwards so we are building relationships within the congregation.

PV-5 The people were in close relationships when pastor came as there were very few left. Pastor trained greeters and insisted that every board member make it a point to engage newcomers.

PSQ8) Did your preaching and teaching change? If so, describe, if not, please explain your style.

PZ-1 Eventually, moved from 3 point sermons to a narrative format and added multimedia elements to delivery. Focused on preaching message series that focused on practical application of Biblical principles.

PZ-1 interview: Yes we did, we didn't even have an overhead projector. Yeah, when I came we had two restrooms, one in the front and one in the back. Basically what, we did is we started having, once we got the bathroom, we started having movie nights, because we wanted to do community things so we had a projector on an old fashioned stand because we had a drop ceiling and we couldn't mount the projector. And so we started showing movies and then I started occasionally having a clip off of a DVD in my messages. Then we, moved to having a more contemporary piano player so we could have choruses. We knew that was the direction we were heading and we wanted to, you know, get out of the hymn books because we were running out of hymn books, and we didn't have enough so we put the hymns on slides on the projector. Then we introduced choruses on the slides and like I said, I would put my message notes on the slide. and so it was kind of a gradual, natural transition. You know, and we would have the kids singing songs that were off of YouTube. Things and stuff like that, and so we used the kids and specials with songs through the computer and things like that. And our church has always been well accepting of anything new because we don't ever create the mentality that this is never going to change. One Sunday we had pews and one Sunday the chairs were there. It was just, you know, we didn't have a lot of discussion about it we just did it and now we have two projectors because we no longer have drop ceilings. Um, because we had help with some community service who was a certified electrician he took out the drop ceiling and restored the 20 foot ceiling recoating and put all new lighting in, and we put in two projectors now to project the front and the back. I'll have the bulk of my message on the slides, verses I'll preach on my iPad, but I have the bulk of my message on the slides. Understanding of course, that I am a really good talker, but a good talker doesn't always mean that's always good, so I mean you need to be held accountable. So, I have my message on that to hold myself accountable but then every Sunday I have a clip from a movie or a documentary. We have a lot of mostly unchurched people I find some sort of secular media resonates the value of the message with the individual. I always try to have a teaching component, supplemental reading, I have all these physical foundation components, and then a media component that ties those aspects of people's lives together. And it's usually 2-5 minutes sometimes at the beginning and sometimes at the middle and sometimes you know, the end but it ties the message in together.

PY-2 Pastor's style of preaching did not change, but his style was new to the church. Uses a practical, didactic style that preaches towards a decision to change. Taught the Bible and people learned new things.

PX-3 No change reported.

PW-4 Started with sermons on change, grief, unity, and vision. No preaching on spiritual growth.

PV-5 Pastor is an expository preacher. Added illustrations to help congregation understand the message. Pastor began teaching a basic theology class which has helped the people understand why they believe what they believe.

PSQ9: How did you plan, measure, reflect, and practice accountability?
PZ-1 Initially a lone ranger. Planned “no brainer” changes like children’s church, indoor plumbing, visitation. With coming of new DS, planned and measured accountability were implemented at monthly accountability group (Success University). There reports goals, statistics, and my strategic plan for healthy personal and leadership development.
PY-2 Check interview:
<p>PY-2 interview: Everything, because we started maybe 30 new ministries in that first six years, of which maybe ten are still going today. Everything that we started we used experimental language. We’re going to be experimenting with this. This is something we going to try. So the expectation was this isn’t going to be a long term deal, and the only way this is a long term deal is if it really takes off and is effective. And if it isn’t, we’ll try it for a while. We had a huge growth spurt in YEARS REDACTED where we really doubled in size in basically a period of six weeks. And it was, there was a stirring behind it. There was a home group of people from various churches that were struggling to find a church that would be willing to reach out to their community. Off and on some of them started attending here and then all of a sudden they all started attending here and then two or three families from other communities; it all sort of happened at once. We decided that we would have game night. Game night was held on the second Sunday of every month. We had board games. We had card games. We had whatever. We had a meal. It was great fellowship. And that really worked with that group because they were all people who lived within ten miles of the church. The next big growth spurt that we had involved communities that were farther away including TOWN REDACTED, which is where we have a satellite now. We tried to do game night, it had sort of run its course. We tried it again and the only people that showed up were the people that had showed up before. We did it two times and that second time I gathered everyone together and said “You know, we’re doing this to connect folks, and it’s just us. We’re already connected to each other. We don’t one more thing to do. And it was over. So the expectation was for things not to go long term. If something really took off, like we have something we call “Dare to Care” which isn’t original to anyone. We know if you’re in church or not and you’re tracked with a database. We don’t tell people this, they know. They don’t know how organized it is behind the scenes, but if you come to any of our services we know you’re here. We have three people taking attendance with check-off lists and all this kind of stuff at every service. So we know if you’ve missed two or three weeks which is really hard to keep track of with the size of our church and how spread out our church is. The “Dare to Care” team started meeting on Mondays and we’d go through this stuff we would see what needs there were and who was missing church and we would come up with an action list that would be e-mailed out to around 25 people that were committed to doing something on this action list. That action list would include who needs a ride to the doctor this week, or who’s looking for a washing machine, to who’s sick and who hasn’t been to church for two or three weeks, here’s a couple first-time guests, all those sort of things would be on this “Dare to Care” sheet. Well, that ministry just absolutely took off. I think we started that in YEAR REDACTED. We have four different “Dare to Care” groups now that are in charge of specific types of things. That took off, and so we ran with it. Truthfully, with Sunday School right now,</p>

Sunday School is not accomplishing what we want, so we're either going to change it or we're going to get rid of it. As far as specific measures and stuff, it's just an expectation, it's a built-in expectation that not everything is going to stay the same. So, we don't have specific parameters. We don't say, you know, like with our church plant, or whatever we want to call what's going on at TOWN REDACTED right now, we don't say "You know, they need to be running AMOUNT REDACTED and they need to have offerings of AMOUNT REDACTED a week or we're going to set them down. But if it's starting to die, we're welcome to pass away."

I model non-defensiveness and I would, as a church, practice it. We make it very clear that when you say something isn't working that it's not a personal attack. We're not going to try to.... If someone has a complaint, our first response isn't to attack the messenger. It's ... what I purposely do is we just try to listen and then see what's there. We acknowledge problems. Some of those problems we say, you know there's nothing we can do about that but you're right, that's a problem. It is what it is. We are not in the business of trying to save face and so that has to be modeled by everybody. So when there's a complaint with what I'm doing I'm just not defensive about it. We refuse to take it personally, In the end that has sort of become a trait of this church. We're just not defensive. It takes me back to a professor I had who would say from time to time that "when you're defending, you're losing".

That non-defensiveness by everybody puts us in a position where if something isn't working we're not saying to the leader of that ministry, you failed. We're just saying, hey this isn't working; what are we going to do next. That type of thing. We're doing our best to take the personal. A lot of ministries keep going because of people's feelings. You don't want to hurt someone's feelings by taking away a leadership position or something that they lead. If they lead such and such ministry and that ministry isn't effective it would be very easy for them to feel that you're saying that they're not effective when it could just be that that type of ministry just isn't working right now and the best leader could lead it the best way possible and it would still not be effective right now. Once that's built into the DNA and once people see that in the leader, because you and I both know there are defensive leaders that have to be right. If the leader has to be right, then everyone in the church has to be right. Whereas, if the leader is non-defensive and doesn't have to be right, then everyone in the church doesn't have to be right. Well, if you're truly secure, it's okay to be wrong. You know? If you're really comfortable with yourself, and it's not that I'm the model of security in every area of my life, I'm not, but as a pastor I just no longer feel any need to defend myself. And so, I just don't. It helps that right now 95% of the people that attend the church have started coming since I arrived. So, in many ways, I'm in a position of a founding pastor at this point.

And the good thing, by the way, about non-defensiveness, just so you know, if you don't take credit for the failures, you don't have to take credit for the success either, so you know what I mean. It's not me. It's something that God did. He brought us here and that mystical element that involves God calling a man or a woman to a specific congregation at a specific time is definitely a contributing factor to any successful ministry. That has to be there. There's lots of great things about this story here. In the end, God knew what he was doing.

PX-3 Pastor admits to still being on the learning end of things and does not have any identifiable steps or a single process.
PW-4 Accountability is with the board and the district superintendent.
PV-5 Started as a bi-vocational pastor at this church. Accountable to District Superintendent for work hours. Personal accountability was found through relationships with two other pastors in the area.
<p>PV-5 interview: Okay, well I think the biggest part of that is that we did set goals. Near term, actually three steps towards recovery. Each step of the way we set down at the beginning of the year 13-14 different goals, attendance salvations, baptisms, church growth. As far as attendance of not just Sunday morning service but of different types of training classes, membership – actually cleaning out the records and being honest with ourselves that you know we can't carry dead weight on the rolls. So that was a big one, I mean when I first came here we had you know 18 people coming and we had a membership list of 45-50 members but most of those were relatives of people that had come for years and we just kept them on the rolls because nobody wanted to hurt anybody's feelings by taking them off. So we were very careful to say, you know, 'what's membership?' That type of thing. And go back through it and say yeah, if this is important then we need to not waffle on that? If we say this is what members are required to do we need to look number one – are we doing that, and number two – why should we keep people on the records that aren't doing that? They haven't darkened the door in who knows how many years, and they finally caught on that it's not just a club. But it's a body and the body takes care of itself, you know we bear each other's burdens, and we do this and we do that and the other thing. So, consequently, it was basically from a, 'making sure we are walking what we are talking', and then it's not just words but it's who we are. I guess all of my, as long as I've been a pastor, being a real deal is what it's all about. And there was a, believe it or not, there was a mantra that I started right at the very beginning with people. Two of them actually, and the first one was, how many of you believe in God? And of course everybody raises their hand and then I said but how many of you believe God? And then preach a message from the idea of, you know, we believe in God but if we're going to believe God and believe what he has to say about this, or this, or this. And tithing and giving was one of the first ones that we tackled. It was the idea of being obedient to the word of God. That whole mindset changed, it wasn't instantly and it wasn't an overnight fix but, overall, I think, by means of accountability, it was a personal accountability to the Word of God. And once they bought into that, well, that gave me, as the Pastor, the ability to speak into their lives individually. If I saw something that was out of line in their lives then we, my wife and I, were able to go lovingly confront and say 'hey listen, if you believe in God then you believe what God has to say – then this type of an attitude or these actions and so forth don't make the cut' and most of the time when you lay the scripture out for them and tell them what they're seeing then they are able to then say, 'well then yeah that doesn't match up.' So they usually come to it themselves only at the very very beginning did I run into a situation where I actually had to get hard with somebody. And that person, you know they weren't going to hear it they'd run the church forever. They didn't want to hear about it – they had ruled the church forever and it was, and it's too bad because the result of – small</p>

churches stay small for a reason, and usually those reasons are non-biblical attitudes among believers, and if you let the word of God do its job it won't return in void – it will accomplish its purpose. Then they're either going to bend to it or they are going to have to leave
PSQ10: What would you tell a struggling, small, rural declining church if they were beginning turnaround?
PZ-1 Enlist key leaders to assist in a self-study of the church beginning with its inception. Graph highs and lows, accomplishments and failures, finances, and attendance. Imperative that a consultant be brought in for development of strategic plan for outreach and leadership. Rely on a third party for accountability in systematically measuring growth. Give it time. Some results are immediate, other systems take time to produce results. Leadership development is paramount to the long term effectiveness and growth of a church. <u>Only when systems cooperate does momentum yield sustainable results.</u>
PZ-1 interview: Um, I had been I won't use the word ignored, but not valued as much as a pastor should be, one, because I was in a small rural church with no bathroom, and my husband was a pastor on the district, in a district and an area where women clergy are like hen's teeth. So the DTP consultant team they came in – especially Dr. Borden and he wasn't working with that prejudice he was seeing gifts and talents and things that he could do he was like, 'you know, you need to run with this!' And he would encourage me and challenge me and of course the DS tried to a little bit, but he was kind of hindered because he'd never really worked with women before like me. The consultation team, especially Borden, really affirmed my leadership and challenged me, and that really gave me the confidence to say 'not just I am the pastor of this church but of this community.' I need to take these reins and operate like that and it's difficult for a person who has a personality like myself, who is strong and you know, confident and outgoing, but sometimes we get the feeling from others that we're being overbearing and they are critical or they're resistant. Not the people themselves, but the clergy, or other leadership and so he encouraged me to have permission to do that and that was nice to experience with the team and my DS. So it was a lot of change in the way I was thinking things. A paradigm shift I guess in my thinking.
PY-2 God is amazing; he can do all things. But to truly experience his power in your church you must do two things. 1. Develop his heart lost/unchurched people. In order to reach lost people, I have to give up control, comfort, and many of my traditions. While change for change's sake will not be effective, resisting the changes a church must make to reach the lost is resisting God. God honors those who get serious about reaching people at all costs. He gets that because that is exactly what the Gospel is about. 2) Take bold steps of faith. Big things don't happen if we stand still in fear. Risk everything. Be sacrificial. Do things that are beyond your ability to do. Then when God does step in, celebrate it in loud and vibrant ways.
PX-3 Help them remember their Christian mission. Find better ways to reach the lost, needy, and hurting in the community. Become a strong praying church.

PW-4 It begins with vision casting. You need to cast the vision of turning the church around and then you need to get the people excited about the future. You have to be creative and look for ways to pay for the vision. You have to make the church guest ready and God ready and then begin to invite the community in with outreach events.
PV-5 Identify the problem. Small churches stay small for a reason. In our case our problem was an informal leadership control issue. Do not be afraid to have the difficult conversations and let scripture speak to the issue. Be prepared to take action if necessary. Also, honor God. Our church decided to tithe offerings to missions. It was a scary risk. God honored that risk and the church has never looked back. Get involved in the community. Hold pig roasts or sponsor a community day with games, a parade or whatever. Visit community people in their homes and invite them to yours Small communities are very tight knitted groups.
PSQ11: Are there any other insights you would share about turning around a small, rural declining church?
PZ-1 Consider yourself called to be the pastor of the whole community, and not just the church. Stop pretending to know everything. Be a good steward of the mistakes and successes of other leaders.
PY-2 If your goal is to turn around a small rural church, you are going to fail. God cares little about that. But, if your goal is to transform your small community with the power of the Gospel, you can succeed. God's heart is not for a big church, his heart is for people. Big churches are a byproduct of loving people, not the goal.
PX-3 There has been renewed excitement in this church. VBS program has brought in new members with kids. A church should focus on what it does well. Identify strengths and build on them.
PW-4 Prayer is the number one priority of turning the church around. It is only through God's help that it can be attained.
PV-5 The main reason this church faltered was that they were afraid to go any length of time without a pastor and called the first person to candidate. It was a terrible fit.

LAITY QUESTIONS:
LSQ1) What skills and strengths in your pastor do you perceive as having been most helpful to the turnaround of your church? Why do you think so?
LZ-1 Pastor has deep spiritual commitment to her congregation and constant friendship toward everyone.
LZ-1 interview: Praise the Lord for this pastor, she is a blessing and a true friend.
LZ-2 Pastor embraced work as a disciple of Christ. Showed that pastoring is a calling.

puts everything into the development of the church. so hard-working and committed that she is beyond challenge. With the people. Dynamic speaker who inspires people to live better lives. No person too bad or too good for outreach. Embracing people at all stages of faith journey makes church a welcoming place.

LZ-2 interview: For, I guess I could go way back, so she's always been a dynamic speaker. She includes stories from her own life of course, I don't know if it helps to include that I have a RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION REDACTED background, so I have found the church a long time. So I've listened to clergy tell and talk about the Bible and she still has, and so when I started going there and hearing her speak, you know she talks about it from a practical perspective.. Her background is so unique to how she came to be in the ministry, so it just, she incorporates all that into her messages, like her own struggles; and so it's easy to relate to that, like yeah, I've been there too. So there's that piece of it, and she has always had a series of messages like a theme to it and the last few years with our DS and getting into the Paul Borden and the idea of a district transformation and revitalization. And have a church that's growing and not a church that's dying. They've done a series of things called success university, so through that she's taken those things and she is learning. And those books that she is reading, and then she's brought messages to us and she just she shows a video clip for those people that need that extra little bit of you know 'get your attention'. There's always some humor in it as well as the serious tone. I don't know I don't think anyone has ever walked out of there feeling like they've been chastised, but at the same time you walk out thinking 'mm, I could be doing better'. So those are the types of things, we just got done with a series on – well right now we're doing 'neighbor' like being a good neighbor. And that's a hard one for me and I admitted that to her last week because it's like going out talking to people, and that's just not my thing, so taking each week one week at a time and just kind of listening to the message and figuring out that everyone is my neighbor, but I'm not so good at talking to them and learning about them. What was the one she just did? Oh! The "Circle Maker" was the book, and so she did a whole series of messages on praying hard, dreaming big – I don't know, that one was just a really powerful series of messages. It was about you really have to give it all to God, and you've got to lay it all out there, and you've got to pray hard, and it might not come in the time you want, and it might not come in the fashion you want but God is faithful.

LY-1 Pastor has lots of skills and strengths. High intelligence, willingness to work, patience. Good written communication. Outstanding preaching and speaking skills, peacemaking skills. A dedicated Christian with faith, humility, kindness, and persistence. Family is also an asset to the ministry.

LY-2 Maintains the purpose of reaching lost people with the message of Jesus. Keeping focused on the right things creates a standard for evaluating what should be done.

LX-1 Pastor is open and easy to talk to. Has moved this rural church into the 21st century. Messages are clear and easy to understand.

LX-1 interview: We have, with pastor, we now use praise and worship songs that are much more up tempo and, we have put in audio visual televisions which give visual words and to the music. Plus, we can do different videos that he wants to incorporate into

his sermon and/or videos from other places to get the message across, whatever. And we're not Wi-Fi capable at the church at this point but we've come along a bit. Basically, we all kind of worked together and said 'okay let's try one television and see what you think, and then see if it's something we might enjoy and then go further' and that's when we installed them.

LX-2 Preaches a good sermon. Loves and plays contemporary music.

LW-1 Pastor's vision that respected the past while looking toward the future. Pastor has genuine and sincere love for all people. Pastor is willing to lead by example with unwavering stand to move the church forward in the mission of telling community about the love of Jesus. Pastor emphasized that changes did not necessarily mean that what was done in the past was wrong, but that there are different ways of reaching others for Christ.

LW-1 interview: Absolutely. She came into our church initially as an interim pastor because our pastor who had been for approximately NUMBER REDACTED years passed away very unexpectedly. Our church building was actually at that time an apartment on one side of the building and the sanctuary with some of the basement area for classrooms on the other side. It was a split building. IDENTIFYING DETAIL REDACTED. And also trying to move the church forward under the direction of a new pastor. She came in as the interim within a couple of months we appointed her to be our senior pastor. IDENTIFYING DETAIL REDACTED, but obviously our pastor had a vision for where she felt God was leading our church and wanted to get about her work as well. It was a very delicate time with trying to balance all of that and she did a wonderful job in doing that. The church at the time that she took over was in very bad disrepair, the physical plant itself really needed a lot of updating, a fresh coat of paint the whole thing. So she had a great vision for that that she built during that transition time as we were trying to move forward but still respect what had happened in the past. As what happens in those situations there were people who decided not to turn the corner with us that left the church under her leadership. Some of which simply for the fact that she was a woman. But they were pretty honest about that and to speak quite frankly that was SITUATION REDACTED FOR PRIVACY and some of the members of the church and they chose ultimately to leave the church when we appointed Pastor Brenda as senior pastor. For whatever reason it would have happened. There is always going to be somewhat of a division I think when you have a significant event like that. In any case she was able, in the first year it was very very difficult and I really felt bad. I was a board leader. So running the church, sort of fell on my shoulders and all the to do in search for a pastor. I could sense from the very beginning that this was definitely God's plan and that He had sent us the right person and I haven't regretted that at all in the NUMBER REDACTED years that we've moved things forward. Our church holds from a spiritual perspective, a visual perspective, and just a community openness perspective is 180-degree difference than it used to be. We're very much more open to the community now and I think we probably would not have survived as a church quite honestly, if the Lord hadn't said you know 'this church needs to go in a different direction'. That was all part of the Lord's plan to serve the community that we are serving. But, yes, I guess that her vision right from day one was, it was a tough row to hoe and I think that a lot of people would have said 'you know what I don't need all this aggravation, there's other places I

could be.' We were not financially stable, you know, the plant needed updating and it still does so that's still an ongoing progress. Her vision definitely just what we needed.
LW-2 Leadership skills and a passion for outreach. These are core and essential to introducing or re-introducing a church.
LW-2 interview: He's always willing to meet with people, chair a meeting. I'm on the church board. He brings things to us and lets us run with them, and reigns us in if we get too far out. He's wonderful with community outreach. The majority of the community who do not attend still know him and like him. People on the fringes of the church consider our church their home. When they need something they come, and they respect the pastor. He is the chaplain on our volunteer fire department. Our church is small, but we are vital. We have a very active missions program. Pastor will say to an individual or the congregation that something is not the way God would want us to do that.
LV-1 Pastor's devotion to the Lord in reaching people inside and outside the church has made the church grow. Growth in numbers as well as spiritual growth through pastor's scriptural teachings.
LV-1 interview: I think it was through like bible study or Sunday school, I should say, teaching. And even on a personal level I had some, terrible situations with some family members, my mother before she passed away. So that was kind of a thing that we had and I shared it with him and he really helped me through it. Of course it was the Lord ultimately, but he kind of guided me along and, so that was a tremendous help to me in that respect as an individual. As a church if you're asking that as a well, the church as a whole I would think through just his teaching, you know, we had Bible study and as a group of us- you know I can't speak for the whole church congregation, but from what I have experienced during our Bible study and the closeness there, it just kind of walks away with uh um, I would say a very fulfilling lesson and as we discuss afterwards how appreciative we were for the teaching.
LV-2 Pastor loves God, is a leader, and is faithful and loves people.
LV-2 interview: Some examples of how pastor is a leader. For one, she will encourage people to get out of their comfort zone. She has a great skill of observing and recognizing additional talents in people. And she will show you that she believes in you and encourage you to step out. My husband was one who was not really wanting to commit or get involved. He is a quiet natured man of God. But he sometimes lacks confidence of the leadership skills that are in him. Her encouragement and love and belief in him lead him to many leadership positions. This has helped him grow. She praises and acknowledges what people can do, she helps people grow in confidence and commitment. She has also encouraged the board members to help raise up other people by encouraging and training other people to raise up new leaders. She helps us know the way to talk to others so we don't make it painful or forceful. Make it a nice and conversational experience. This has helped us to get additional helpers, for example in our nursery. We only had one or two people who would help, but this caused them to miss out on being fed themselves. Pastor taught that we should serve, but should not always be serving and never getting fed. Now there are six people to rotate in the nursery. This rotation works well.

LSQ2) Did you participate in any specific training to help laity work through the turnaround process? Do you feel it helped? Why or why not?
LZ-1 No training.
LZ-2 Prescription process based on work of Dr. Paul Borden. Learned church life-cycle at a training session. Learned about a church going through transformation, participated in dynamic worship, and attended small group sessions at this training that helped them understand the assimilation process and how to turn events into regular attendees. It was important for leaders to receive these trainings. Laid groundwork for future changes and helped church understand how to prepare the church. Gave a deeper understanding of why this work is important and how to deal with opposition.
LZ-2 interview: So it started with our DS, NAME REDACTED, he read the book – Dr. Borden’s book and he got to the end of it and he said it was so good that he turned it over and said somebody get this guy on the phone for me, and we’re all sitting there thinking ‘who does that? Who reads a book and tries to contact the author?’ But it touched him so much that he said let’s figure this out. So he got in touch with Dr. Borden and then when he would meet with his board of advisors and he started bringing this idea to them about what the district transformation and how would this look. And we had churches that were really dying and in the, I don’t even know how many years the district has been doing this now, we’ve had a couple of churches close, but we’ve also had a couple of churches close their doors for a short time and then open them back up again; kind of re-branded themselves and now they are kind of overflowing with people, like good things are happening. Our church is this really small church in this little bitty place that even people around don’t know exists and yet people in Australia know about our church from getting involved in this process. So for the first year we weren’t involved in the transformation but Pastor, being part of the advisory board at the district level knew what was happening there and was attending these transformations. I think it was interesting from our church perspective because we weren’t a dying church. We were doing some of the things, because obviously she was learning some of the things from going through the process in other places regarding how we needed to, sort of, grow and do things differently, and even, maybe, before that she started more contemporary worship even though, at one time, we had a lot of – I mean our average age of attendees was 65 so we were trying to get that younger set and those families in. So we weren’t dying, necessarily, we just could do better and so we knew that the transformation wasn’t going to come in and tell us that we had to had to have this huge revamp or we weren’t like another church where they had to close down for a series of weeks and kind of pretend like they were going away and then reopen under this new look to get rid of this bad stuff that they had before and that people associated with them. We weren’t like that, but we definitely had areas that we could improve and ways that we needed people to step up so she kind of said that she’d like us to go through this process and there’s a financial commitment too, that so we, our advisory group, of course we’re still considered – we don’t have a board of directors, we just have our advisory council and so we all got together and said ‘yeah I think this would be good. It would be great to have someone come in here and tell us what we can do to reach more people, especially given where we

are at. How can we reach out to the larger group?’ So she really just took a risk on that but she’s always, I think, that’s always been one of her strengths, she just takes risks and isn’t afraid to say that this is where we need to go. So anyway, so then what happens in the process is Dr. Borden comes, I don’t think he goes to all of them now, because kind of he’s trained the DS and there’s a group that tends to do it. But they come in and they interview us and they take information that they need. They have a community night where people come in and they just get a lot of information and then they tell you and give you information about ‘okay, this is what’s really great in your church, and these are the areas of weakness that you need to strengthen if we’re going to have this mission to create disciples’. And then you have to vote on whether or not you’re going to do it and at that point there was some controversy in the church when we went through that and we came out – you know it was tough because we really didn’t have, I don’t know, we really didn’t have frank and honest conversations about what we stood for, and what we were doing, so that made us have to do that. And that made some people really uncomfortable and made it tough to deal with in that time. But then I think we’ve come out on the other side of it a much better church and the people who come now and the people who we’ve had come since see us as this truly open church, you know a place where people can go and worship and you can have a relationship with God and you’re going to get supported by the church and you’re going to get asked to be, to step up as well, and be a disciple.

LY-1 Were lead through a training called SHAPE, which was helpful. Took an inventory with a consultant regarding the church’s history. Going through Blackaby’s Experiencing God was VERY significant for the church.

LY-2 Participated in a refocusing program. This helped us see how God used the church in the past and helped us view our ‘activity’ in light of what we need to be doing.

LY-2 interview: Okay, I think our district had that available at the time. These people who were connected to our district and I think it helped NAME REDACTED, well it was kind of, where we think God is leading us, but it also said – why are you doing these things? You still need to be doing those things. Um, activities can just overwhelm you if you’re not mindful of the things that’s not what we need I mean, really looking at what God wants to do and figure out what we don’t need to do.

LX-1 Lay Speaking classes.

LX-1 interview: Constantly doing some type of training and some type of conflict resolution type of things. My big thing is that I like to be the person at any meeting but I have many ongoing classes behind me. Not just for church but for my occupation. Until I took that first initial basic lay speaking class I had never spoken in church let alone the services. I mean we always had lay Sunday of course but I was never interested in or thought that it was something I could do. Once I took that, NAME REDACTED decided that was something that needed to be done and I could help him run services so.

LX-2 No Training.

LX-2 interview: Um we’re trying to do a VCI –Just beginning. We have had two or three people get involved in the Lay Speaking program.

LW-1 No specific training was provided to the laity. However, since the turn around the church leadership has provided “vision days” for other smaller churches that need to change but don’t know how.
LW-1 interview: That is something that our new DS, ironically, we had just gotten a new DS about two months before all of this happened in our church. He had come in to visit and to see that this facility under the original pastor and could see that there were definitely things that needed to be cleaned up and fixed up and, to make the church more presentable. By the way we were down to about 12 in a worship service at that point and now we’re at almost REDACTED, BUT MAGNITUDES GREATER on average in TIME REDACTED years so that’s how much of a turnaround we’ve had. He obviously held our hand through the selection process and was very instrumental in bringing us our pastor. And within 6 months after we really got things rolling there, he came back to do another visit at the church and was really quite astounded at the change. And so he had seen in his visits to the NUMBER REDACTED other churches in the district a number of other similar sized churches that were struggling with the same thing. They just didn’t see that they needed a fresh coat of paint and to clean up the property, and what not, and so he selected, I believe it was around 15 of them, that he invited to come on a Saturday to our church and we did various – the pastor and myself – various people from the church did a presentation about our involvement. And we had taken a number of pictures, kind of before and after stuff, and kind of took them on a tour of the facility. And we were able to show them, for example, how we converted and painted the whole entire basement area in the children’s ministry on a budget of about \$500. And you know we’re talking about 8-10 rooms and it was really just a matter of a lot of painting and we took coloring books and traced them onto the wall and filled them in and made them bright and colorful and inviting to kids as before it was scary for kids to go to the basement. I mean it was dark and dingy and it didn’t smell good, and the whole thing, and so we did some visioning that way, and as I said he specifically handpicked pastors and leadership from other churches that he felt could benefit from seeing what we had been able to do with a very small budget.
LW-2 John Maxwell – 5 Levels of Leadership – very credible resource and valuable to build other leaders.
LV-1 Only prayer.
LV-2 Prayer sessions.
LSQ3: What do you believe was the greatest challenge for your church to bring about turnaround? Why?
LZ-1 Getting fellow believers to accept change and step out in faith. Personally did not want to change.
LZ-1 interview: It was hard in the beginning because some had issues with getting a woman pastor. As a church, we weren’t motivated when the new pastor came on. We did not have the Holy Spirit pushing us to do these things. But with the pastor, she came in and both showed us, and taught us what we needed to be doing.

LZ-2 Greatest challenge was the elderly who were set in their ways and change did not appeal to them. Leadership team understood that the process could alienate the elderly, so they were prepared to lose some of them in order to begin a stronger mission of reach out to those who do not know the Lord.
LY-1 Keeping an open mind and a listening heart to discern where God was leading us and the doing the tasks before us. Believing and trusting humbly in God and encouraging and loving each other.
LY-2 Keeping the vision. As a group we were being stretched in our faith and vision and some found this difficult.
LY-2 interview: Okay, I think this is in all kinds of groups but people who are, , it's easier for them to step back and watch, they'll support, but with more emphasis on the others than them. You know we kind of started this other church in another community and, I think, it's been hard for some of them to see that vision. Perhaps they think we might need to be strengthening where we're at, I think in our group there are some of those, but the same people who were less eager about the vision were the same people who were less eager when we were stretched to come up with a full time pastor and get a pastor up to a respectable support level. And build a parsonage and build a church and they just maybe by nature aren't going to – I don't know, I don't want to step out on saying this much but – you know, but they've been supportive and they're still here you know? Um, but they're the ones that kind of hold back and that's probably true with any group. They need to find a personality as much as anything but, I think that this is a comment this has come across my mind in the last couple of weeks is that, we never have really had any, I don't want to say disagreement, but we haven't had any inside problems with people not getting along, even though they weren't sure that maybe it wasn't the right thing to do but they're still there. I mean, I feel blessed that we haven't had to send – well that's not the word I was trying to say, we might not have had anybody just SO on different steps of faith but, or anything like that it has really been a blessing from the Lord.
LX-1 Church is very rural with a small population. Congregation is mostly elderly with few young people to take over the running of the church.
LX-2 Improvements made over time in membership and attendance, but it did not last because we did not meet deep needs of the people. Many don't know the denominational beliefs and no continued education is offered after membership. People are asked to assume positions/roles without job training. Need all kinds of leaders for Sunday School, youth, etc.,.
LW-1 Issues with the former pastoral family .
LW-2 The facility required serious upgrades and the congregation had to embrace changes in worship style.

LV-1 Greatest challenge was to bring the member who left the church back together. We needed to let them know that God never gives up on his people. He will never abandon us, even in loss of membership.
LV-2 Don't become discouraged. There were bills to pay, a pastor to hire and to stay focused on what God wanted and follow his leading.
LSQ4) What do you feel was the most important change to turn things around? Why?
LZ-1 Pastor encouraging congregation to desire to move forward.
LZ-2 Many small things led the way for bigger changes. Built a bathroom funded by donations from outsiders. Put in a parking lot for a very small cost. Slowly modernized our worship. Improved the pay package and made budgetary decisions based on faith rather than dollars in the bank. Pastor's passion and slow change helped them see themselves as a more modern church.
LY-1 God sending the current pastor.
LY-1 interview: Well, building the parsonage was a wonderful experience for the comradery and the fellowship and not knowing, you know, we didn't have a pastor in mind and we didn't even know; we felt that God was going to send one, but it was a delightful just our fellowship together. Some people came, a few people – two different teams came to help us so one of them brought – the lady brought some kids too, and then we had a lot of grand kids involved here then. So anyway, she held a little vacation bible school for them while we were building and of course they were as much involved in the building too – climbing on the dirt piles that were stacked around and I don't know what all it was just kind of a heavenly – hard work and a terrible hot summer, oh my goodness the summer of YEAR REDACTED was so hot here it was really something. I still remember my son crawling out from under where he'd been plumbing under there or something and he was soaked, you know, totally soaked with sweat. Anyway, and the community too, they probably thought we were a little nuts maybe, but we had some of them pitch in that didn't have a real strong commitment or anything to gain by it. It was awesome, and oh we put scripture in them. The kids wrote scripture on the walls before we put the sheet rock and that kind of stuff in and so the house is full of scripture and thoughts and things. If they ever tear it down, they will find some good stuff. Let's see, how the community changed? I don't know, we're not a very populated community you know in TOWN REDACTED there is only about 40 people, so people come in from the other little communities and the country. Our VBS is really remarkable. Our difficulty is, now some of those kids that come to VBS are from other churches and that's good, the follow up, it seems like I'm a little dissatisfied that we can't permanently get ahold of some of those kids. Of course VBS is active, I don't know a lot of hoopla – a lot of excitement and stuff and then I think Sunday school is not as, well there's not as much. People would come out of the wood work to be involved in VBS, it's short. All kinds of workers and stuff, but to get workers for the Sunday school, my daughter-in-law has just been overloaded because she's just so faithful, but it's just been hard lately the last few years to get children's workers that want to be reliable every Sunday. Whereas, they're

glad to pitch in for the excitement of the VBS. I mean the VBS is really something and so that's something we're really trying to pray about and solve to take advantage or reap permanent results and attendance and workers and all. And in the old days they just didn't schedule any tournaments and things on Sundays and now we've got people who just started coming real recently, a big family, but they've got a kid who is as much in wrestling but there's seems to be wrestling stuff on Sundays all the time so here they are gone for several weeks. Sports around these big communities anyway is a big priority. And if you are a part of a team your responsibility really is to be with the team, but I wish they would respect Sunday, you know, so that they just didn't schedule things for Sunday. Now our communities have been pretty faithful about leaving Wednesday open, Wednesday night open. So youth group doesn't have to compete with sports and that's a lot to be thankful for and 4H is also on Wednesday nights so once a month some of them are gone before 8 for youth group but anyway, as far as transitioning from a smaller church to a larger church I think us old folks we're not at all hard to deal with, there weren't too many of us anyway. Sometimes I've known places where they really didn't like too much change of all these extra people barging in, and I've heard of that. I think it went well, I just think God was in it in a remarkable way and we let Him be in it and it's been – I don't think you could duplicate it because God's going to do what He is going to do where He is going to do it as long as we cooperate. I've got a little quote I've stuck up here that my granddaughter gave me, 'you know great things but only small things with great love' and that's from mother Teresa and then I've just now, just lately I found this quote around somewhere and stuck it with a little sticky note here besides 'there are many willing to do great things for the Lord, but few willing to do small things for the Lord.' And I want to be willing to do the small things. And then Helen Keller, I also have this quote, 'I long to accomplish a great and noble task but it is my chief duty to do small tasks as if they were great and noble.' Right, little as much when God is in it.

LY-2 Leader and laity that were steadfast and faithful knowing that God's work here is not done. The church is not about being comfortable, but about us reaching others. People willing to set aside preferences if it means connecting with more families. Principles learned in the Experiencing God study really helped.

LX-1 Our music is more praise and worship with some old hymns worked in. Video has been introduced over TV that display various songs, videos and messages. Praise and worship songs help keep the worship time upbeat.

LX-2 Church is very friendly and inclusive. There must be activities of interest to all ages frequently. With members acting as leaders/organizers and pastor participation. When this is lacking other interests in the community draw members and nonmembers away from church attendance.

LX-2 interview: Um, the only one we've had is a bunch of funerals. You know we're in the funeral phase. We have quite a few people that were older, they were older. But still you know that's the main thing that we've done. Funerals are a way we are connecting with the community.

LW-1 We had the current pastor as an interim for a while and during this time and

relationships were built. There was no pressure because it was not a long term position at that time. Once the Pastor was permanent and the issues with the former pastor's family were addressed we started the renovation and refreshing of the facilities and planning various outreach and community events. Pastor gave weekly updates via power point with pictures of progress while pastor shared vision for the church. The key was keeping excitement and buy-in for the change.

LW-1 interview: So, periodically when we embark on any kind of a new project, for example, because our finances are still, you know, we're bringing in what we're spending and we're looking at, like I said, we've grown. Our sanctuary holds only about 15% more capacity, so we just last month at the LBA started talking about -- we're bringing in people to start looking at what do we do about growth because we're going to run out of space. Do we start a second service; do we need to add on; what do we need to do? So, we've started to look at that and we've not ruled any of that out for our congregation, but when the time's right we will do that. For example, we just had a bathroom installed in the basement of the church, there never was any restroom facilities down there. Now that we are using all of the space down there for our children's ministries it became a problem -- we had been doing children's church service and our only restrooms are in the back of our sanctuary so if kids had to go to the restroom during church someone had to bring them up to go through the back of the sanctuary and into the bathroom. So we went to the congregation with this vision of what we needed to continue to grow our children's ministry and gave them the statistics as to how many kids we were now serving and what we were doing down there, keeping in mind that some of these people don't go into the basement; they are older people. And that we really needed a restroom down there. Now these same older people who noticed that the kids have to come into the back of the sanctuary and go to the bathroom, they certainly were aware of the need, but she provided all of the information and said we need to raise this much money to do this and put it out there, and we started the process of doing the fundraising for that. And as we were doing the project, she began, about once a month, doing an update, here's how far we are on the bathroom and this is what still needs to be done and this is how much money we still need to raise so. She does little things like that all the time whatever the project may be that's going on. Whenever we do a community outreach which we have never done in the past, she is very big about bringing people on our campus that know who we are and know what we're about so we can give them tours of the building, trying to reach the unchurched specifically. We do a huge Easter egg hunt, last year we had almost 600 people on our campus for the Easter egg hunt.

LW-2 Pastor and church are a good match. It is important to have a good fit.

LW-2 interview: He's is down to earth with us. He loves to go fishing and hunting and has a good rapport with the guys who do those things. He is not always in a business suit. He really fits into this rural community. There are couple of younger guys has responded to him because he offered to take him fishing. He reaches out to the children by doing fun things with them too. The church is small down to earth and mostly rural people, used to be mostly farmers. Small time farming is hard to survive on anymore. The church sees him as a spiritual leader and as good friend. We find his wife wonderful too. I can't say that everyone is 100% happy all the time. That doesn't just happen. We are conservative. You don't find us rolling in the aisles. Many are older people, and we

are constantly working to draw in younger people. Three quarters of the town is grandparents and great-grandparents. We are comfortable and compatible as church and pastoral family.
LV-1 New pastoral leadership – because things were difficult with former pastor. Membership losses were very great and almost closed the church. With new pastor church was re-energized.
LV-1 interview: We were so beaten up, so down. We were praying and praying that something would turn around, but it just wasn't happening. Luckily the District Superintendent came down with an intervention. We were in a pastoral search. He talked to the pastor at that time to see if he would be willing to bow out. The church kept paying him, and a new pastor would come in. We needed someone else to take hold of the reigns. This happened before we got to the place before we almost closed the doors. We had lost a lot of people. When the new pastor came in, he was on fire. It was just what the church needed at that point. I guess you would call it revival. And, what people were left there, it was just truly enlightening. He'd just gotten out of school. We were desperate. God set us up for the new pastor. We couldn't afford a full time pastor because we didn't have enough people to support a full time pastor. Pastor was part time for our church, and part time at a camp. He stayed at the parsonage for our church. He was paid by the camp and the other half came from our church. That got us on our feet until we knew we could pay him full time. He was supportive. He was always getting people involved in different positions in the church. There are a lot of new people. Not everybody came back, obviously.
LV-2 When the board voted to tithe on our offerings into missions.
LSQ5) Describe the ways you observed the church take care of people already attending the church. Describe the ways you observed the church reach out to people who were not part of the church.
LZ-1 Took care of people already attending by meeting their needs outside of church by becoming involved in their home life and always in prayer for their needs.
LZ-2 Not changing too fast helped us care for those already attending. Having people outside the church invest in our church inspired those in the church see why change was needed. Some changes did not appeal to the people because pastor's fidelity to the mission kept reinforcing need to bring others to Christ. We are a friendly church. New people are greeted by multiple people. No one is turned away. At least four community events – not church events. Invite all.
LY-1 Birthday and sympathy cards and/or flowers. Communication was key. If someone missed on Sunday, we took them a bulletin or mailed one. People got involved in parsonage building project. Wonderful fellowship and camaraderie. Reached out to people who were not part of the church. Special events. Group called Hammerheads helped people with home repairs.

<p>LY-2 Purposeful in creating fellowship opportunities to help keep us all connected in the vision and stretching we have done. Spirit of unity, though not always unanimity. Having trusted leadership. Demonstrate God's love to all and welcome all. Being in activities that support the community because we care. Festivals, VBS, visitor cookies, Dare to Care prayer team and visitation.</p>
<p>LY-2 interview: Okay, we have, well let's see, our church makes a note of everybody in attendance at 3 services every week. And it's not like somebody checking in like people going through a list and if somebody is missing there's a, or if somebody's got a prayer need or dare to care is really a prayer and compassion group I would guess but it's a follow up of what when people are missing. They meet on Sunday after services and meet for that prayer request like a prayer chain but beyond that they're making notes and visits and calls you know. The people, it may not just be anybody that attends, perhaps, but we still like that in our community that they see that we are reaching out and trying, so that's what it means. The plan with the pastor, of course, is that really practiced by the people.</p>
<p>LX-1 There is a very active prayer chain. Meals are taken to families in times of need. Visitation is made as needed. There are also banquets/fellowship meals.</p>
<p>LX-2 People make an effort to organize and participate in prayer. Bible study, potlucks and celebrations. We phone, stop by and visit with people we know who are under distress. We reach out to our neighbors, friends, and family to attend activities and church services. We work on an equal level with people in need, treating them with respect.</p>
<p>LW1 There was confusing at the time of last pastoral transition. The DS was instrumental in helping the church through transition. Part of our turnaround process was to fling open our doors to the community and say, "here we are, and here is your God who loves you." Continue to do big community draw events.</p>
<p>LW-1 interview: We're stretched for volunteers there's no doubt about that, I'd say there's about 50% of our congregation are 55 or older so they don't, I mean there are a number of them that some of the behind the scenes stuff, say, stuffing Easter eggs or whatever, but we are stretched. Pastor, again, will follow up and the next Sunday she will have pictures and the statistic of how many people were there. She just has the ability to build a lot of excitement for these things. The first year we did a live nativity with live animals and its outside and it's a pre-recorded message that plays but we actually had a woman who walked down the street that said 'I have lived in this cul-de-sac for 30 years and never set foot on this property' and she now attends church there. In sight of the church for 30 years but never had any reason to come on campus, so those kinds of things are just growing and Pastor just has a knack for growing excitement and we do this all with a very small budget. We budgeted a total of AMOUNT REDACTED for outreach events and we do the live nativity, we do the Easter egg hunt, and we do a trunk or treat. We're actually going to expand that this year with we're bringing Chip Rider. I don't know if you're familiar with him, he's a trumpet player who's from the state of Pennsylvania, but he travels worldwide. His mission is just to bring the message of God's love and we're going to tie that in to patriotic outdoor concert of some kind so</p>

<p>we are starting those plans now. But Pastor, we are on a major, one of the major routes in our area so we just put out a sign in our front yard and that gets us a lot of exposure. We ask people when they come our events, you know, how did you hear about it? We advertise in the papers and we just started our own web page that we'll be able to do mass mailings from we're going to do online registration for our events, you know we're growing and if that's what we need to do to keep up with the minimum volunteers. We had expanded our live nativity this year to not only have the outside event that we've had for the past two years but the inside in our fellowship hall we set up an old fashioned market place as to what it would have looked like in the times of Bethlehem. There was a little spice shop, there was a little carpenter shop, there was a little shop they could go in and make string beads, each little shop was an activity for children and adults to come in and participate in. And there were a number of people who said 'you know this is going to become an annual family tradition for us'. We were really enjoyed the time to come here. Again pastor's whole concept is to get the people from the community on your campus to find out what you're about. Church is not just a boring place that you come on Sunday morning and sit and listen to a sermon, but you know, there's real people here that care about you and love you and that's her concept of outreach.</p>
<p>LW2 Engagement of members so they continue to feel valued. For new people, activities such as trunk or treat, live nativity, or egg hunt.</p>
<p>LV-1 Church remained involved in weekly activities. Children's group, bible study, prayer groups, Sunday school, church fellowship dinners, etc.,. Church body was encouraged to reach out to family, friends, and the community to witness and join in church attendance.</p>
<p>LV-2 We love each other, we pray, laugh, and cry together. We pray for our community, when there is a need we help or meet it.</p>
<p>LSQ6) What would you tell a struggling small, rural declining church if they were beginning to attempt a turnaround?</p>
<p>LZ-1 Put faith in the Lord and let no obstacle stand in your way.</p>
<p>LZ-1 interview: I don't know how to explain it to you, but I believe that a church should pray about it and open their hearts to the Holy Spirit. We weren't motivated, but a church must be motivated to turnaround.</p>
<p>LZ-2 Pastor start with a series on discipleship and the role of believers. Believers should not be consumers of worship. Worship should be a means to bring others to become followers of God. Make small changes to make the church welcoming, especially to families with children. A strong children's program is the foundation of church growth. Reach out to community organizations and have the church work to support those groups. The more community outreach, the more a church will become a central part of the community.</p>
<p>LY-1 To go before the Lord and pray and listen. Study Experiencing God, particularly</p>

chapter 7.
LY-2 God is able to do more than we could ever dream of if we make ourselves available to be used by him for furthering his kingdom.
LX-1 Discipleship is key. You must extend invitations to attend every function and worship. Personal contact repeatedly has to be maintained.
LX-2 Get training that is offered by the district. It is a long process, but to succeed, planning and buy in in needed.
LW-1 Do not be afraid of change. The church is not a building where you meet to worship, it is the people, the vision and the ministry of your church. Embrace change and let God lead you, he has a plan for your church and your individual lives.
LW-2 It is critical to build a strong/solid foundation which includes a vision and a mission. All activities must feedback to these statements.
LV-1 Keep God first in prayer and leadership and everything you do. Be aware/prepared for spiritual attacks through the growth process. Seek assistance through your district. As for other churches to pray for God's strength, wisdom, and direction.
LV-2 Pray for God's will to be revealed. Form a missions board. Tithe 10% of offerings to missions and use it for God's work. When you are truly doing God's work, he will bless it

Judicatory Questions:

JSQ1) What teaching/coaching/training was given to the clergy to equip them for leading a turnaround in this parish? List and explain. (include whether or not a coach or consultant was used.)

JZ-1 Okay, we went in with the team, for a consultation, but prior to this she had been part of a cluster group sometimes called a Pastor's learning community. I run those nine months a year and once a month. She would have been a part of that several years before this turnaround took place. Once we went in for the consultation Friday of interviews and focus groups, and the Saturday training and then the prescription. I was able to put her in touch with an individual in California who'd been through this before, and she paid \$100 a month to have two or three coaching calls per month. I believe he was out to see the site once or twice and after this she continued to be a part of the cluster groups that we have on a monthly basis where the things that she was going through continued to come up after. It took her about a year or two. I brought all of the ones that had been through the transformation weekends together for what I call an equal forum. They told their stories and how they'd come and what they'd been working on or what they anticipated happening over the next 12 to 18 months. I believe what is intended in a
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coaching relationship is continual. And she, for a couple of years, could back up the call log any number of times over the years. We backed her up.

JY-2 Pastor arrived prior to current DS. Suspects that pastor had not been given any specific training. He did a self-learning process.
I 'm going to make a preface statement then I'll answer the question. Pastor NAME REDACTED came to TOWN REDACTED prior to my assuming this role. So, I don't know – to answer your question, I don't know what training he received. My suspicion is none.

JX-3 DS not involved. Brand new.

JW-4 Assistant Pastor at other churches. Received active coaching with DS. Received ongoing training in Leadership development course met for one year. One on one and group coaching.
She's been an assistant pastor for all of her career prior to this but she was on staff at different churches. My wife and I – when we came three years ago observed with her very strong leadership skills so we coached her through the process. Active coaching through the process of handling back and forth conversations on how you do this. I do a leadership development course that is a one year course that we need all through the year and she was in on all of that. A lot of what we talked about applied to her situation and she asked a lot of questions so there was passive coaching in a group setting and more one on one coaching as she went through the process. Her case was that she followed a pastor, a beloved pastor who died suddenly, so that break-away created emotion that she had to take on because she was replacing this beloved pastor. Which means any change proposed is not just the normal problem of presenting change and how hard that is, but you're changing from the beloved pastor's way of doing something, so that just added a volume to it.

JV-5 DS only in 2nd year. Serving as a pastor in the district, so has some familiarity. Leadership Development provided support encouragement on a peer to peer level for the pastor.
Well I've only been the DS, this is my, I just began my second year so I was a pastor serving in the district when the turnaround took place. So my knowledge of the turnaround there well, is twofold. My dad pastored the church there when I was a teenager so you know, I'm familiar with the church and the people there and often go back to that church community so there's a kind of a personal connection to the church and observing it from that perspective. But also, being a fellow pastor on the district team while Pastor NAME REDACTED led the church through the turnaround. So what I know is aside from the individual dialogue with the DS, the leadership development journey, um LDJ as it was called, you know the Wesleyan church had a few years ago. I know Pastor NAME REDACTED was a part of that and I believe that really just poured the encouragement that he received during that. I don't know that I'd necessarily call it training but, more peer to peer encouragement and idea sharing and support. That will largely be where he received his more encouragement during that time.

JSQ2) What training was given to the laity and what was the purpose of the training?
JZ-1 Before we went in for their weekend, they, the church including the lay people, were involved in a self-study. They sat down with their pastor and answered a bunch of questions that we'd given them to dig into their past. So they had that background going in. On the Saturday of the consultation that we did there was a six-hour training that I did based primarily on the life cycle of the church. It is the relationships, ministries and construction that we have six hours of teaching that we put together. Afterwards, after 2 ½ years or so, I went back to the church and retaught this material to the laymen as a refresher course. Early on, just after this weekend the church and their leadership were involved with the lay coaching weekend are, or at least the 3-hour training that Dr. Gordon did, with a group of churches in that area. So that was the extent of what that church received over the last few years.
JY-2 Not aware of any training specifically given to the laity. To the best of the DS knowledge.
JX-3 DS not involved. Brand new.
JW-4 No district training provided other than to the board when the DS met with them while they were looking for a new pastor. Helped them to see through the options in from of them and prepared them for the coming changes. Helped them get on board with the new leader. Small church, very tiny to start with. Trained them on how to manage transition. The depth of change was very deep. From the district level there was no training given to the laity other than to the board when I met with them and the process of finding the new pastor. I went through with the board we took out time and managed emotions, managed expectations, managed the 'how to see through the options' that were in front of them and also how to get them ready for change. We talked a lot with the board that change was coming and they need to be ready for that and they're going to need to be out in front of it with the new pastor, whoever that would be. Because, you know, God removed the other pastor through death and this will be a new day and they are going to have to help. The deal with the board was to get them ready for a leader, and for them to be a leader also, because they are going to have to help manage expectations of the folks of the congregation. It's a small church anyway, starting out it was, you know, I don't know – AMOUNT REDACTED maybe, it was a tiny church to start with. So the training was with the board on how to manage transition and how to manage welcoming a new pastor and getting on board with a new pastor. It seems initially that there was some resistance, but NAME REDACTED won them over. Yes, won them over but also many left. Many who were, were pretty seriously invested in the former pastor. Not in the former way of doing things but in the former pastor. Because NAME REDACTED came in and we told her to start a process of change. It was the depth of change that she had to do, and in any turn around setting it was much deeper than any church going through the normal transition times. It had to do with the facility, it had to do with ministry, it had to do with operations – you know the whole thing had to be seriously adjusted.

<p>JV-5 No formal training was given to the laity. Pastor focused on leadership development. They noticed unhealthy dynamics within the church body. Addressed that conflict and paralleled leadership development with that situation.</p> <p>Yeah, I don't know of any formal training with any sense of curriculum I do know that Pastor NAME REDACTED spent a significant amount of time focusing on leadership development. One of the things that he encountered there when he initially got there was the recognition of unhealthy dynamics within the body involving some particular families. And so while addressing the congregation it was related to that, he paralleled that with Biblical leadership development across the church that I think significantly impacted the church's turnaround.</p>
<p>JSQ3) What were their greatest challenges to turning around?</p>
<p>JZ-1 I think helping people understand that it's not something punitive but it's a privilege to go through these. In every case with my people, I've played up the fact that my pastors were heroes for allowing someone to come in and look at the bulk of their situation. And lots of pastors become very fearful that this takes place and refuse to allow our team to come in. And we never go in without being invited. We discovered that it takes longer to turn a church around than you might think. It's not going to a 12-18-month process, but in our churches which for many are over 100 years old it takes 3, 4, 5 years to work on mindset and so after the weekend there's an initial thrust and burst of enthusiasm. Excitement as they leave the station, and then they get out into what we call the muddle in the middle, the Bible talks about it being the desert – like you leave Egypt and you're out in the desert and just wandering around while you're trying to sort through stuff, and then of course there's a lot of enthusiasm just before you get to the promised land. So there's not that muddle in the middle that people don't accept it and some leave, some resist change when some don't want to become an outward focused church. So we find that's the thing we have to stay encouraging them and letting them know that it is going to get better. Sometimes upsetting the status quo there's going to be some of that. Okay, just visualize moving from here to there. Here is the mess we're in, there is the preferred future. The Bible teaches all this and when you move from here that's exciting. It steps out across the Red Sea. And when you arrive in the promised land that's great, but there's a lot of living that goes on in the desert. People leave, people resist, people fuss. At the same time souls are getting saved, baptisms are taking place, church is becoming more outward-focused. So there's a lot of conflicting things there that takes place in loving churches.</p>
<p>JY-2 Biggest challenge was the ability of the lead pastor to fully embrace a rural community. Pastor was raised urban. Pastor had to educate himself on what it meant to pastor in a rural setting. He became an expert in the rural mindset. His ability to educate himself on this mindset was critical to the turnaround.</p> <p>Yeah the biggest, biggest challenge was the ability of the pastor to fully embrace a rural culture. Yeah, NAME REDACTED background I believe is city. He grew up in, PLACE REDACTED His prior ministry assignment before TOWN REDACTED was in PLACE</p>

REDACTED which is a rust built and industrial city. It was very, I mean you have a very strong urban culture there. And when NAME REDACTED came to TOWN REDACTED he had to educate himself in terms of what it meant to pastor a church in a rural setting. And he immersed himself in that and he became an expert in the rural culture, rural mindset, rural how decisions are made in a rural setting. And I think if there is anything that was critical to the turnaround situation it was his ability to educate himself along those lines.

JX-3 DS not involved. Brand new.

JW-4 Facilities. Difficult building. Considerable building renovations needed. Husband of new pastor was skilled at repairs. Parking lot, driveways, all kinds of issues. Remodeled basement. Transitioned from pews to chairs. Programmatic changes. Building redesigned around great emphasis on children's ministry. Former ministry was heavily weighted toward people with physical and emotional difficulties. They were not reaching the larger community. They had to enlarge their capacity to see what else they could be doing as a church. (This DS recommends that pastors get a coach.) On the facility side it was a very difficult going REDACTED INFORMATION, but the church then didn't have the right classrooms and things like that and the church was always limited. And this whole building needed considerable upgrading and updating and remodeling and so that was going to be one task. Even the way the parking lot and driveways were lined up – all of those things needed addressing. The pastor, the spouse who was very adept at those kinds of things, and spouse brought a lot of his skills- they were the perfect couple to stick in there. When it comes to the facilities it was the whole thing. They had pews instead of chairs – they had to transition to chairs. It was all of those kinds of things. The complete gutting of the parsonage, there was all kinds of emotions there because that's where their former pastor lived. Now they were going to gut it and make it into classrooms and offices and things like that – there was a basement that they completely remodeled to get it ready for, children's classes. So facility there was a huge change – programmatically there was a huge change. They were about to do a parade emphasis on children's ministry which meant you had to design that building around children. And around the welcoming of children and making it something that young families can be excited to bring their kids to. The congregation itself, the former pastor's ministry there was heavily weighted toward a people with, with physical or emotional disabilities. That's a wonderful ministry to have, but it's a very limiting kind of a ministry. That's who you're going to be reaching, so they weren't reaching the larger community – they were really going after a target audience. The pastor, REDACTED came in and created new visions to not just reach that part of the community but also to reach the larger community for Christ. So that was a changeover in how to bring along people who were invested in that field of ministry and in that passion and how to bring those people along and enlarge their capacity to see what else they could do as a church. Yeah, with pastors – you know, it's one thing to be competent, and to have character, but it's something else to have capacity to push walls out and see beyond what you currently see. Even pastors have that problem. If you're only stuck in your own little world, it's hard to see outside of your little world. Sometimes you need to enter into someone else's

world to see a whole different way of thinking out there. So to give you an example, in our district we are going to be taking a bus tour – next spring we are going to pile pastors and spouses into buses and take them around to see churches that are getting it done, and doing a nice job in their ministries to push out the boundaries that’s all it’s meant to do. We are calling it a vision tour and we’re just as excited, too, because the impact it has in my life when I do that. Typically, you are going to be a solo pastor in a turnaround situation any way. Number one, the task can get awfully lonely if you have pretty serious resistance initially, it can be very very lonesome to do that. To have someone outside of your local church – to walk with you through it, and to give your perspective and to give you a different way cause all you’re hearing or whatever is all those negative voices. You’re changing their world and you need to get balance and a coach who might tell you how you handle that criticism. Whether it’s a book, coach, or a live person it’s a key to have those voices in your head to give you guidance and perspective and recommend ways of managing.

JV-5 Church got down into the 20’s. Practically, could the church continue? Volunteers were a problem, leadership needed work, money shortages, and the issue of having enough people for critical mass. There were also power issues. Pastor had to confront some people lovingly and receptively. Community recognized the changes. The church worked together in a Christ-like manner. Communities recognize when churches handle things right.

Well obviously the church got to a place of, they call it, critical mass. You know, it got down into, I believe even into the 20s. One of the challenges was, you know, just practical – could the church continue financially and otherwise? Leadership and volunteer, when you get to that kind of a number you’re at a place where you’re beginning to ask hard questions, ‘can we continue?’ So the church had to deal with that. But I know that in, with talking with NAME REDACTED and sharing that I had him do a presentation for a group of rural small church pastors this past year and he kind of relayed the story to those pastors. So not only was there the critical mass thing, but there was the recognition of some unhealthy dynamics in terms of relationally within the church. Our issues that had not been confronted by the previous pastor or pastors, recent pastors so NAME REDACTED had to confront some people lovingly and I, you know, just point out to them where their leadership, where their behavior was not biblical and um, you know, that was difficult and in a time where you really don’t want to lose people you just kind of confront people that way. But NAME REDACTED did by challenging people, redemptive, but challenging them to work together in a Christ-like manner – the church began to see a turnaround. The community recognized the changes, I mean they recognized that some of that unhealthy individuals and behavior had been addressed. Being in a small community then those outside of the church can recognize when changes like that take place and that brought about the turnaround.

JSQ4) What changed regarding church services and programs? List and explain.

JZ-1 Well I’m not speaking specifically about that one church now, but we believe that, one of the assumptions that we go on in with is that, the church does not exist for the people who are already there. But the church exists as a launching ground or a staging

ground to reach those people that need Christ as their personal Savior. As we go in we discover that helping churches change their mindset and think about them is not always easy because they've been self-centered. It's all about me, mine, mine, therefore their agendas are self-centered. And it's about my music and my seating and my parking and my family, so we could keep it to help them understand it's not about me but it's about those people that are out there. Many changes have to do with the shifted music styles, reaching the young families of today. It has to do with updating and converting the nurseries, making sure they are beautiful places. It has to do with updating restrooms, putting in nice places for people to gather and hang out. Spending time by the coffee bar. We believe that there are three things that drive a church like this. One is worship, the worship must be done with excellence, in particular we come back to that. All churches have a hard time getting the music that they need. We believe in assimilation as the second thing, most churches do not know how many guests come in, they don't know their retention rate, they don't have a next step, they don't have a way for people to get 'velcroed' in to the system, so assimilation is another thing. The third is the children's ministry. It's a huge part of turning things around because older churches, dying churches have lost their young couples and their children. So we focus a lot on upgrading children's spaces, and children's ministries until there is a wow factor and people understand how much we really really believe that kids are important and special.

JY-2 Because of an interim pastor, the new pastor inherited a healthy group of people. Pastor was then able to teach them to be open to change and the change was to create a culture in the church that was accepting, welcoming, and hospitable to newcomers. Okay, I'm going to – again make a statement to preface an answer to the question and the preface is because of the ministry of an interim pastor coming to PLACE REDACTED, NAME REDACTED inherited a healthy group of people. That's the state, that's what you, kind of, need to know as the back story-so to answer your question with this healthy group of people he was able to teach them to be open to change. And the change specifically was to create a culture in the church that was accepting and welcoming and hospitable to new members.

JX-3 DS not involved. Brand new.

JW-4 Environment of the church changes and became cheerful. Positive aesthetic. Recreated the whole platform. New sound system. Changed worship with contemporary worship. They found that it was ok to sing new songs. Placed a larger emphasis on children's ministries. New people were coming and liking the church, which was motivating. This pastor is a good communicator. She helped them build hope and have a vision for the future.

The environment in which people came to church changed, so did the physical environment, the physical church plant. It was cheerful, before that it was kind of a downer; kind of a depressed building to walk into. So the first thing when people walk on the campus, they walked into the building and it was cheerful. It had a fresh coat of paint ,they removed the pews and went to chairs. They recreated the whole platform; they redid

the whole platform to make it more visually appealing. They put in the new sound system and all of these kind of physical changes gave people a positive feel when they are just sitting in there. They may not have even been able to identify what they were feeling, but just that one step of freshening up the building is very encouraging to the emotions of people. Then they began changing the worship to make it much more inclusive with contemporary worship. They had a team that was able to play instruments well and sing well. Getting people used to singing the new songs and feeling that it was okay to sing the new songs and things like this. They began to put a larger emphasis on children's ministry. This got people excited when families came and all of a sudden the church people who had been around for a while realized that 'look, we are attractive to families in the area. We are attractive to other people. I mean that's got to be a shock when a new person shows up and likes it and wants to stay. So changing the worship service, and NAME REDACTED brought a lot of good energy and she is a good communicator. So it's changing the worship style, all these things, changing the building itself, all contribute to new vision for the church that it has a future, because when your pastor dies you even wonder what's going to happen. What's our future without him? And, so she needed to instill 'look, God's still here, He hasn't left and we have a great future when we follow God.' So that was probably her focus for the first year or so to give them a hope for the future. Jeremiah 29:11 if you will.

JV-5 Services became more celebrative in style of worship. Blended services. Focus was celebrative and contemporary. Still do hymns. Facility changes, turned the sanctuary around and improved the atmosphere for worship in the sanctuary. Right well, from a service standpoint they began to bring a more celebrative style of worship so I'm not going to say that they made a decision to go from traditional to contemporary. I would imagine that NAME REDACTED would tell that their services are blended, in other words they still, the focus wasn't entirely on the type of music, so they still do hymns. But they introduced, of course was, the focus was to have a more celebrative style of worship and the introduction of more contemporary instruments. They don't have a large worship band or anything like that but I believe that they made a very intentional decision to be celebrative and to um, craft the worship service in that way and I think that was also instrumental in, they also made some changes to the facility. They turned the sanctuary around and kind of did some work that uh, just improved the whole dynamic and atmosphere for worship in the sanctuary. As far as I know they stayed with Sunday school and they stayed with a fairly traditional model for worship and discipleship on Sunday morning. It was more of a change of the style and the focus on celebration and prayer that I think was instrumental in the turnaround.

JSQ5) Did they change their administrative structure? If so, how and why?

JZ-1 Okay, many of these churches are just being held back by an old congregational form of government where you vote on everything and where people are put in position due to popularity and longevity instead of because of giftedness. So the reason we begin to work on that is that is the, that is there to hold the church down, and so we will try to

move them into what we call a modified Carver model. They actually call it the Carver model as depicted in the book “Winning Old Purpose” by John Carver. In it we talk about the fact that boards govern through policies, procedures, and budgets. The pastor needs a staff of paid and unpaid to manage the congregation as ministers. And we set it up so that pastor is accountable to the board, they are asking him questions that have to do with his morality and his theology, finances, human resources and they are not micromanaging the church. The pastor leans on them. When it comes to the ministry of the church, the pastor appoints people who are in charge of all these ministries, and they meet on a monthly basis with what we call a ministry team. They come together to report, they come together for accountability, they come together for authority and responsibility. And they develop their own small teams, but it’s just very important to us that we set it up so that the pastor has the ability to put these people according to their giftedness in the right place. And then of course those people manage their children’s ministry and life ministry, worship ministry, whatever it may be. They have the authority they don’t have to run back to the board for every little thing or every little pickle, but they are held accountable.

JY-2 Hired an assistant pastor. Expanded administratively the pastoral staff and its responsibilities. It is very important to give personal care to the congregation. The church gave pastor permission to expand staff. Change was facilitated by having an emotionally mature group of leaders at the church that enabled them to give him permission to make changes.

He hired staff and he’s expanded administratively some of the pastoral responsibilities of the staff there. And the why is because one of the values of the church is that it is really important to give personal care to those who affiliate themselves with the church and because that’s such a high value NAME REDACTED couldn’t cover all the bases; he couldn’t get to everything as the congregation grew so the board gave him permission to expand staff. He was able to orchestrate that change because he had an emotionally healthy group to work with because the group that he inherited was spiritually mature and emotionally mature. And their maturity allowed them to give NAME REDACTED permission to facilitate that change from a board led church to a staff led church.

JX-3 DS not involved. Brand new.

JW-4 They did change around the structure in the board. They worked to put more health in the structure of the administration. More organized. Very involved in the community and be helpers. They have a group that looks for ways to be helpful.

They did change the board around during the first year or so. People left eventually and then she replaced them with different people. But she has a very strong treasurer and lay leader in the church. That person, NAME REDACTED, brought a lot in and brings a lot of health to the concept of structure – what I call scaffolding. So it’s pretty loose and when you’re in a small church sometimes the structure is often very loose-more like a family approach rather than a business approach. And NAME REDACTED brought a much more prevalent organized model of just keeping the church functioning whether it’s from the financial side to the board meeting side. They are also a very involved church. They love the community, and they love to do things and be helpers. There is a particular group in the church that loves to say ‘how can I help with things?’ Even the district will

find them showing up to help and pull something off.
JV-5 Pastor is very organized, good administrator and detailed. Good leader. Style is to respect and listen to and lean on the wisdom of the board. This was a welcome change. Yeah, no not that I'm aware of. I just know that NAME REDACTED is a good administrator and a good leader, very organized and very detailed. Well, I will say this, I know that NAME REDACTED leadership style that while he is a strong leader, his leadership style is to respect and listen and lean on the wisdom of his board. And I think that might be, you know, that was a welcome change maybe from some of the pastoral leadership that they'd experienced in recent years that was maybe a little more autocratic.
JSQ6) What outreach and evangelism methods did they use? How do you feel these methods worked out?
JZ-1 Uh, generally we're not teaching them a specific soul winning plan, if you're asking if they have a service of realization and consecration; they confess their sin of getting their eyes off the ball, then they go out into the community on prayer drives or prayer walks. Praying over schools and public spaces, asking God to give them souls and then we ask them to shed two numbers one is the number of people they think God wants them to touch with the love of Christ over the next 3 to 5 years. That would be the just acts of kindness and love that we talk about. The second number how many people do you believe God wants you to have a conversation with in the next 3 to 5 years that will tell your story of this is who I was, this is how I met Jesus, and this is what He is making out of me with the idea of sowing the seed and if there is interest at all to know how to go ahead and close the deal. Focused relationship evangelism. Relationship evangelism doesn't usually work if there is no accountability and focus because it tends to just go forever and ever without anybody asking for the sale
JY-2 What they did worked out very well. Resources and efforts were put into children's and youth ministry. Evangelism is the culture of the church. They are on mission – not in maintenance mode. They know why they are there and what they need to do. They make disciples and bring people into the kingdom of the church. They gave a lot of attention and effort and financial resources to children in youth ministry. And then the people surrounding saw that here is a church where their kids could be cared for and word outspread and it kind of took off from there. And that comes back to the culture of the church – there's one of the churches in STATE REDACTED, and we have a number of them, but this is a church that's on mission okay? They're not on maintenance mode they know why they are there, they know what their responsibility is, and that is to make disciples of people for the Kingdom of Christ who make disciples and that's what they give their time and effort and energy to so – that's the culture of the church.
JX-3 DS not involved. Brand new.
JW-4 The first thing they needed to do was to repair the community reputation. Needed

to change from a more internal focus to reaching out to the whole community. Big community events like the Easter egg hunt. We are not the church you thought we were. They are involved in parades. Wanted the community to know that the church was there for them. There was a core in the church that wanted to do something. That was a key. Pastor is good at leading a team and replicating herself.

The first thing they needed to do was to deal with the community reputation. And part of what you have to turn around is how the community feels about you when they drive past or when they hear your name. Every community has an opinion about the churches in its community so they needed to change that. They needed to turn away from more internal and focusing basically on targeting one segment of the population to being a church for the whole community. So they did things like, they'd do a big Easter egg hunt; which for their local church of NUMBER REDACTED they attract a couple hundred or more. These community people step on the campus they are there. That's really about exposure to say 'we're not really the church you thought we were before' you know? 'Things are changing here'. They make sure that they're present in the community. They've talked a lot about being involved in parades maybe things like that –to get the church to show that it's here – that it's in the community. One of the great concerns was that they wanted to have the community know this church was there for them. That it was present and going to be involved in the community. They wanted the community to be a better place because the church was there. So they were trying to change the reputation of the church in the community. The initial step of evangelizing the community is that you have to let the community know, first of all, that you're there. That you have open doors and that you're ready to receive and welcome people in. That was because they had such a great and involved group that said you know 'let's put our arms together, let's do something. So that was a good thing with NAME REDACTED. She walked into a real group of people that there was some core that said 'let's go, let's do something here'. One of the reasons you have turnaround in a church is because there's a church that's burnt out and doesn't want to do anything and– that was not the case here. This was a group that wanted to help and wanted to come up alongside her and NAME REDACTED is very very good at leading a team from the gate rather than doing it herself and thinking that she has to do it all as a pastor.

JV-5 Made an intentional focus on the community. Worked with the fire department in organizing community events for celebrations. Religious release time with school children coming into the church during the week at the end of the day. Use facility and property to make a positive impact in the community.

They made a very intentional focus on the community of, I believe that they were instrumental in working with the fire department which is right next to the church, and organizing the town celebration like TOWN REDACTED days you know that kind of thing. A parade with floats and community picnic, TOWN REDACTED has a fair amount of property they used that to help organize those community days. They also have, well I won't even call it an after school program but more of a religious relief time. So they have school children coming into the church during the school year, during the week, during the day – I believe it's kind of like at the end of the day at the end of the school day. So it's kind of pretty intentional about using their facility and their property

to make a positive impact in the community which opens the church to grow.
JSQ7) How did they strengthen relationships in the church while being open to newcomers and assimilating them into fellowship?
JZ-1 Well, we believe that once you have a clarity of your vision and people come along and align themselves with it, there's an enthusiasm and excitement because of that shared vision. But when agendas are competing and there's not agenda harmony that can be demotivating and actually can mess up relationships. Um, because of everybody having their own terms and their own space and their own ideas. Now everybody, everybody doesn't buy in and then we decided very early some people won't stay – they will leave, but we believe this: That with a vision and a goal and a dream and an agenda the people that get behind that are the ones we want to stay. Too long we've catered to the ones who are selfish and self-centered who wanted to keep the church in the old ways, and the progressive people have left and left us with churches that have declined and near death.
JY-2 Intentionality of pastor to make sure the value of the rural lifestyle. Slow down and pay attention to relationships. Leveraged position in church to help develop a strong sense of community within the core. Taught congregation to be open and welcoming. There was a lot of intentionality on NAME REDACTED part to address that. Again coming back to what I said earlier, he understood that one of the values of rural lifestyle is slow down, pay attention to the relationships that are important and once NAME REDACTED understood that he tried to give that special kind of attention to the folks in his care. So, in other words, he has leveraged his position as the pastor to help the church and help the people in the church stay connected, okay? And then simultaneously, going back to some of the things we talked about a couple of minutes ago he taught the congregation to be open, accepting, hospitable to outsiders, to people in various communities. And so I wish I had a copy of their worship folder that their worship states in print on the front folder, 'we're glad you're here, come as you are. If you have mud or cow dung on your boots welcome don't let that stop you we are a loving people.' I mean it just proves through example that the church is very accommodating, there is a lot of love going there it's just a great place. So he's done two things, he's really worked to strengthen the core, the community – the sense of community within the core and then once that's happened simultaneously established a sense of warmth and hospitality and warmth that makes the people come and stay.
JX-3 DS not involved. Brand new.
JW-4 Not specifics.
JV-5 Pastoral couple is very strong in pastoral care. Pastor and wife love on the people. The balance is done by pastoral care. In a small church pastoral care is key. Challenging the church to open their arms to the community. Got to have a shepherd's heart and the heart of an evangelist. It is and I think one of NAMES REDACTED strengths is not a strength for every pastoral

couple, but it is their pastoral care. And you know, while I think he challenges them to reach the community, there's just no way you can get around it, especially in a small church, is a pastor and a pastor's wife who love on people. I think you'll find that that's been how they brought about that balance. They, as a couple, have the unique ability to love their church family, and to grow them through their pastoral care but at the same time to be as comfortable with people living outside of a relationship with Christ and challenging the church to open their arms to them too. I think, I'm not saying that there aren't people in the TOWN REDACTED church that also help provide some pastoral care but, in a small church I don't think it's ever going to change. It's got to be a, have a shepherd's heart and at the same time have the heart of an evangelist.

JSQ8) In what ways was your leadership used to help in this turnaround?

JZ-1 Well you probably could get a better answer than anybody else, from somebody else. I would hate to see a district try to do this with a DS who is not all in. I think being all in is the clusters, which is the pastor learning groups which is huge. Dr. Borden would say we had a head-start to further that, I think being all in – by meeting with the board before we go, going and preaching to the congregations and describing what happens, being a part of the weekend when they're there. Then by following up and helping coaches, counseling and coaching on the telephone afterwards, going back around and re-teaching the material. I was crucial and integral in what's in place.

JY-2 Very little. Most everything was in place before current DS came to office. Come alongside and encourage.
Probably very little, again these kinds of things were in place before I took on this role. NAME REDACTED is an expert; he took on a lot of self-study. All I've done, is kind of come along and enjoy the ride and do what I can to say 'go get 'em'. You know, keep at it. You know, I don't know if I had any particular role than to be an encourager.

JX-3 DS not involved. Brand new.

JW-4 DS and wife very involved in the process. Over the top the DS team gave the pastor the sense that pastor had their support. Encouraged and coached. Leaders need to give support to pastors because turnaround pastoring is hard.
Well, my wife was very involved she's co-district superintendent here and she was very involved with NAME REDACTED in process of the turnaround and she was doing a lot of coaching with NAME REDACTED. And continuing to be available to her through the process. Another thing that we gave to NAME REDACTED was an over the top sense that she can count on our support, that we have her back. Life as a turnaround pastor is already hard; it gets a lot harder if you don't feel like you have your leader's support when things get difficult wherever you are, so we would often just encourage her to keep going, we know it's hard but keep going. We are with you; you are not alone in this. So that's probably the two things, the coaching model that was in her life as well as the, just the encouragement that we – we got her back and we're good to go with her and we believe in her.

JV-5 Turnaround happened before DS became DS. Pastor to go to Maxwell Center at 12 Stone. District funded. Got leadership training for pastor there. District also utilizes pastor's expertise with other pastor's and churches.

Personally, because the church's turnaround happened before I became the DS, what I've done now was try to lean in on him and utilize him to invest in some of what the pastors of churches who are in the place where TOWN REDACTED was before he came there. I guess that's where I've tried to offer him encouragement is, for I know this year we did provide funding for him to go down to the Maxwell Center at 12 stone and participate in the leadership training there. So I didn't directly, you know provide training or support to him but I made resources available to get him down there and to continue to invest in him. And I've also then utilized him as a resource to encourage him and celebrate what God's done through him and to have him begin to pour into some of the pastors in some of the smaller churches in our district.

Appendix G:
Handout Materials from 180 Turnaround Conference March 10th, 2016:

Attended this conference in DeWitt, Michigan at DeWitt Redeemer United Methodist Church. This material is presented as a resource and was not used in the writing of the dissertation as the event followed the writing of the dissertation. The material below is from the two general session handouts presented by Rev. Dr. Rod Kalajainen and are used here with permission. For more information:

<http://www.dewittredeemer.org/Ministries/conferences/conferences.html>

General Session 1: Common Threads of Successful Turnarounds

1. In every effective turnaround, top leadership has to be personally and visibly invested in the effort every day.
2. A turnaround requires a commitment from every person from the top down.
3. Leaders need to not only make the tough calls but also stand behind them – first with courage and then with humility.
4. Beyond taking responsibility for tough calls, such as replacing leaders who are change-resistant and realigning resources to mission . . . it is equally important to focus on the people being affected and to be present for them.
5. Sometimes just showing your humanity is the thing that is critical during the darkest moments.
6. We need to be intensely focused on what needs to be done.

Guidelines for driving change.

1. Create a partnership model.
2. Communicate early and often.
3. Attend to the culture.
 - a. Start with your leaders.
 - b. Build trust.
 - c. Bring some balance to your efforts.

- d. Create a structure that makes success easier.
 - e. Encourage bottom-up ministry.
 - f. Eliminate overlap as well as create a path for ownership and accountability across the various ministries.
 - g. Reduce blame and encourage friendships and teamwork.
4. Invest to grow.
- a. The pastor and leadership of the church must reading and studying together what it takes to grow a church.
 - b. Focusing on growth creates opportunities for people and allows the congregation to see that you have a compelling vision for the future.
 - c. Vision means knowing what programs and ministries to keep even as you are making the tough choices on what not to do. Again, this is where mission, vision, and core values . . . along with alignment are critical.
 - d. Another part of the vision has to be attracting more people to your church and reversing the reason people are leaving.

Create a 30 – 60 – 90 day game plan.

The problems that got your church into the situation you're in didn't happen overnight. The beginning and the end for a lot of congregations is the failure to anticipate what is coming down the road.

The 4 Most Overlooked Truths About Leading a Turnaround Church
(Karl Vaters)

1. When a church gets turned around it will be heading in a different direction.

Why do we use the word 'turnaround' if we don't want anything to change?
2. A turnaround means more than surface and stylistic changes. Turnaround happens in the middle ground of attitudes, methods, and systems. It involves

- vision, alignment, budget, website, culture. . . and just about every other aspect of church life that you can think of.
3. Turnaround doesn't start with what we add, but with what we remove. It's easier to see our real needs when we have nothing.
 4. A turnaround church needs a turnaround pastor.

Six Recent Lessons I Learned from Turnaround Church Leaders (Thom Rainer)

1. They led the church to become highly intentional about starting new groups.
2. They led the church to a culture of inviting people.
3. They began new member classes.
4. They began a major community ministry.
5. They began to pray for the lost and unchurched by name.
6. The leaders began to focus less on negative people and circumstances and more on God's possibilities.

John 1:1-18

General Session 2: Worship and Preaching Matters

What is the image of the preaching in your church?

Preaching is, and always has been, an intersection of life and faith in a community context.

Pastors in small to medium size churches need to think and act like a church planter. It's time we make our weekly message the first thing we do each week. . . not the last thing.

Preaching is still one of our primary tasks. And introducing people to Jesus is what we're all about.

Thom Rainer: "In turnaround churches, laity understood that if their pastor was going to have the time to do the type of preaching that they needed to do, then they (the laity) would need to take up the role of ministry as they're supposed to do" It's hard to overstate how important the centrality of preaching was in each of these turnaround churches.

In churches where there is significant growth through conversions – there is a direct correlation with a high priority on expository preaching.

Suggestions on How We Can Breathe New Life into a Declining Church.
(Steve Scoggins)

** The pastor is the key ingredient in turning around a declining church.

1. Preaching that turns churches around is Biblical. Romans 1:16
2. Preaching that turns churches around must be relevant.
3. Preaching that turns churches around is understandable.
4. Preaching that turns churches around is passionate.

Things that Motivate Me as I Prepare a Message:

1. Where in the message do I clearly point to Jesus?
2. Where in the message do I speak to Christ-followers?
3. Where in the message do I speak to non-Christians?
4. Where in the message do I speak to the heart/attitude?
5. Where in the message do I give people something to do immediately?
6. What is the application to our daily life.

Effective Worship:

Only about 15%-20% of Americans worship as Christ-followers on a given weekend.

One of the keys to turning a church around is creating worship that matters.

Most people's first exposure to our church is going to be on Sunday Morning.

1 Corinthians 14:25

The Principles that Turn a Church Around:

1. A church that turns around is one that becomes intensely spiritual, more Jesus centered.
2. A church that turns around is one that makes new efforts to be warmly expressive in its love.
3. A church that turns around is one that majors on the majors, not the minors.

4. A church that turns around has a pastor who knows how to plow around stumps.
5. A church that turns around fans flames instead of throwing water on people's fires.

What is God using most effectively in your church to reach people with the love and the power of the gospel?

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