

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

**A Missional Resurgence: Helping Bridges Church to Rediscover Her
Missional Purpose Resulting in Vibrant Growth**

A Thesis Project Submitted to
the Faculty of Liberty University School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

by

Patrick Norris

Lynchburg, VA

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Liberty University School of Divinity

Thesis Project Approval Form

Dr. Adam McClendon
Thesis Project Faculty Mentor
Doctor of Ministry Program Director

Dr. Jason Mitchell
Instructor Rawlings School of Divinity
Faculty Reader

THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

Liberty University School of Divinity, 2020

Mentor: Dr. Adam McClendon

The church in America is facing difficult times. The majority of churches are experiencing plateaued or declining attendance and a lack of spiritual vitality. While every church is unique in her own experience, there are some common factors that can lead to new life and vibrancy. The purpose of this study was to understand how to lead a specific church, Bridges Church in Winston-Salem, North Carolina to rediscover her missional purpose and discover vibrant growth, as individuals and as a corporate body. This study utilized the REVEAL for Churches Survey, an online survey that is both descriptive and prescriptive in nature, to determine the spiritual vitality of the church and to determine specific interventions leading to greater vibrancy that have been successful in other churches which have taken the survey. This survey was administered to the church twice, once in the Spring of 2019 and again in 2020, with a year of implementing specific interventions between the two. These interventions were specifically focused on creating a more missional culture, a foundation of this church when planted in 2007 and through her first four years but which diminished over time. Each of the interventions was based on specific results from the REVEAL for Churches Survey and led to results placing Bridges Church in the top percentile of churches in the United States in regard to church health and vibrancy.

Key Words: Archetypes, church revitalization, missional, plateaued or declining church, vibrancy, the spiritual continuum, spiritual growth catalysts

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Every local church is unique with her own story and is made up of unique people, each with their own story. While there are differences in the stories, there are similarities in all churches built around the common questions of purpose, direction, and reason for existence. There is an overriding question that every church must answer that helps answer the other questions: “How do we help people who begin their spiritual journey far from God without hope and life to become Christ-centered, fully surrendered to Jesus, full of life and love for Him?” The answer to this question is all tied up in the Great Commission, the command of Jesus to make disciples, people who follow Jesus, who love God with everything they have, willing to lay down their life, pick up their cross and follow Him (Matt 22:37; Luke 9:23).¹ This leads to another question: “How does a church become vibrant and full of life?” The answer is simple; it is in making disciples who are becoming vibrant and full of life because the church is simply the people who follow Jesus in a local setting. If they are becoming mature, vibrant, and full of life, so the church will become.²

This vitality is not true of most churches in North America today, many of which are in need of revitalization. Over eighty percent of churches are either plateaued or declining, around ninety-five percent are less than one hundred people in attendance and between three thousand five hundred and four thousand churches close their doors ever year.³ The church is in danger of

¹ Aubrey Malphurs, *Strategic Disciplemaking: A Practical Tool for Successful Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 13.

² Cally Parkinson with Nancy Scammacca-Lewis, *Rise: Bold Strategies to Transform Your Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2015), 3.

³ Harry L. Reeder III with David Swavely, *From Embers to a Flame: How God Can Revitalize Your Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 7.

falling behind the population growth in North America.⁴ Many of the people who make up these churches are not living lives that demonstrate the transformation made possible by having Christ in their lives. In many ways, they are no different than non-Christians. They have similar divorce rates, struggle with domestic violence, substance abuse, and other issues in rates close to non-believers, and are more likely to have racist attitudes than non-believers.⁵ Many who identify themselves as churchgoers do not attend a small group or class, do not intentionally spend time with other believers to foster their growth, do not share their faith with non-believers, and do not read their Bibles daily, which has led to a “discipleship deficit.”⁶ Aubrey Malphurs and Gordon Penrod point to church researcher Tom Rainer’s conclusions that “Eight of ten of the approximately 400,000 churches in the United States are declining or have plateaued”⁷ and then conclude, “The church of Jesus Christ in North America is in a free fall with no bottom insight.”⁸ The church in America is losing her vibrancy and strength at a time when more and more people are in need of the life-giving power of the Gospel. In the end, each church will be evaluated by the health and vibrancy of her disciples.⁹

As dire as the situation is now for the church, there is hope. God is at work and active in the world. The church belongs to Christ. He has promised to build His church, and He is working to revitalize churches throughout His kingdom. Revitalization and new life are possible for the

⁴ Aubrey Malphurs and Gordon E. Penrod, *Re:VISION: The Key to Transforming Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014), 21.

⁵ Jim Putman and Bobby Harrington with Robert Coleman, *Discipleshift: Five Steps that Help Your Church to Make Disciples who Make Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2013), 20, 21.

⁶ Robert Gallaty, *Rediscovering Discipleship: Making Jesus’ Final Words Our First Work* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2015), 12.

⁷ Aubrey Malphurs and Gordon E. Penrod, *Re:VISION*, 21, 22.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁹ Robert Gallaty with Randall Collins, *Growing Up: How to be a Disciple who Makes Disciples* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2013), 1.

church and for the people who make up the church.¹⁰ There are churches that have experienced decline, toxic environments, spiritual disease, and a loss of vitality and yet have been able to turn around and move to greater vibrancy and growth.¹¹ It is possible for a church that has once experienced health and life to experience even greater new life as defined by God’s Word after a time of decline.¹² According to Cally Parkinson and Nancy Scammacca Lewis of REVEAL for Churches, there are churches in America who are seeing real growth and health, who are not the norm, and who have found ways to not only survive, but thrive. They write that “the word vibrant – full of life – perfectly captures the dynamic, spiritually effervescent nature of these churches.”¹³ According to the REVEAL for Churches research, in these vibrant churches, “more than 60 percent of the congregation is in the Close to Christ and Christ-Centered stages of spiritual growth.”¹⁴ Vibrant churches have more than twenty-five percent of their congregation who are extremely satisfied with the role their church has in their spiritual growth, they are large and growing, they have the smallest percentage of people whose spiritual growth is stalled, they considered their leaders to be focused on the mission of the church and moving forward, and they are diverse in many ways. However, there are no silver bullets in this process. It requires hard work in partnership with God in making focused gradual changes to change the culture of a church and to see real change occur.¹⁵ This change must involve getting back to the mission of the church to make disciples.

¹⁰ Gary L. McIntosh, *There’s Hope for Your Church: First Steps to Restoring Health and Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 21-23.

¹¹ George Barna, *Turnaround Churches: How to Overcome Barriers to Growth and Bring New Life to an Established Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1993), 23.

¹² Andrew M. Davis, *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017), 20.

¹³ Parkinson and Scammacca-Lewis, *Rise*, 133.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 136.

¹⁵ Daniel Im, *No Silver Bullets: 5 Small Shifts that Will Transform Your Ministry* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2017), 5.

The early church was full of life, reaching people with the Gospel and seeing God at work in many ways as they lived in community together (Acts 2:42-47). They were focused on bringing glory to God by following Jesus and fulfilling His Great Commission.¹⁶ The task of revitalization then is to create “great followers of Jesus” who live out His mission in the same manner as the church in her earliest times.¹⁷ It is not enough to simply “do church” or to simply make converts. The goal is to make disciples who are sold out to the mission of Jesus in obedience to Him and to become like Him in every aspect of their life, surrendered to Him and full of life and love for God and for others.¹⁸ A missional resurgence is the church rediscovering her mission in the world to partner with God in bringing people who are far from Him to becoming followers of Jesus, fully surrendered to Him. This is where life and vibrancy as a church are found.

Ministry Context

Winston-Salem, North Carolina is city with a long history. Established as a city in 1913, the city’s story goes back well before that to the early 1400’s where a movement with missional roots began that led to the Gospel-driven Moravian Church and the founding of a community called Salem.¹⁹

The Moravians, which began as the United Brethren, are considered by many to be the first Protestants, born out of the teachings and following of John Hus, an early church reformer

¹⁶ Dave Early and Rod Dempsey, *Disciplemaking Is ...: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2013), 7.

¹⁷ Reggie McNeal, *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 20.

¹⁸ Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal About Spiritual Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 12.

¹⁹“Moravian Story,” City of Winston-Salem, Recreation and Parks, accessed March 3, 2020, <https://www.cityofws.org/2159/Moravian-Story>

who died in 1415, one hundred years before the Lutherans. Facing persecution, these Christians fled throughout Europe in an attempt to find a safe place to form a Gospel-centered community. Many of them ended up in Moravia, a region in what is now in the eastern region of the Czech Republic. Again, facing opposition, they were drawn to the estate of Count Nicholas Von Zinzendorf in 1722. This estate located in the Saxony region of Germany also became the home of many religious dissidents. There on August 13, 1727, there occurred a religious experience that would change this movement into a missional community with worldwide results.

During a communion service and a simple meal involving the entire community, there was a great sense of the Holy Spirit at work in unity and love. Their hearts were quickened and convicted, and an outbreak of repentance, conversions and fellowship broke out. The event was so powerful no one wanted to leave so Zinzendorf sent food from his estate so the people could continue to stay together. To many it felt like the days of the early church as described in Acts 2; Jude 1:12, and 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. This simple meal is now celebrated yearly in what are called Love Feasts, held during the Advent season. Due to the overwhelming presence of the Holy Spirit, the people there began to dream of reaching the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Within a few years, groups of missionaries began to be mobilized in one of the first great missional movements. They left to carry the Gospel to the world, going to other countries including Holland, England, Denmark, Surinam, and the American colonies. There they formed missional colonies and demonstrated the Gospel through acts of love and charity in these new lands.²⁰

²⁰ “The Lovefeast,” The Moravian Church, accessed March 3, 2020, <https://www.moravian.org/2018/11/the-lovefeast/>

Two of these early communities settled in what became the cities of Bethlehem and Nazareth in Pennsylvania in the 1730's. There they continued to look for areas in need of the Gospel and eventually set their eyes on and purchased a large tract of land in the northwestern region of North Carolina which they called Wachovia, after a muddy creek located on Count Zinzendorf's land back in Germany. On November 17, 1753, a small band of twenty-nine Moravians arrived on this new tract of land and established a new settlement and fort which they called Bethabara, or "House of Passage." This historical site is less than one mile from the current location of Bridges Church.²¹

Bethabara was never intended to be a long-term community though many of its buildings survive today as a part of a historical site. By 1759, a new settlement called Bethania was established where eventually plans were made for a much larger, master planned community that would become the center of the Moravians' work in North Carolina. They named this new city, Salem, and work began there in 1763. Salem became a major trading center, and its influence spread throughout the region. Within this community, the missional heartbeat continued as they reached out to the local Native Americans, other settlers of European descent and eventually to freed slaves who came to live in the area. Salem continues to exist today as a small preserved historical community where Moravians still worship but it has lost most of its missional fervor. Eventually, the city of Salem merged with the nearby town of Winston and became the hyphenated city of Winston-Salem in 1913.²²

Today, Winston-Salem is a city of two hundred forty-four thousand and is undergoing a transition from being an industrial city built on textiles, the manufacturing of tobacco products,

²¹ "The Moravian Story," City of Winston-Salem, Recreation and Parks, accessed March 3, 2020, <https://www.cityofws.org/2159/Moravian-Story>

²² "Statistics," City of Winston-Salem, accessed March 3, 2020, <https://www.cityofws.org/1032/Statistics>

banking, and railroad transportation to a city of economic diversity focused on medical and innovation technologies, higher education and service. Like many cities in the South, it is facing racial and diversity issues with a growing Hispanic population. Over the past few years, revitalization efforts have been working toward renovating the downtown areas of the city. It is a city with over four hundred thirty churches and yet over forty-five percent of the residents list themselves as “nones” when questioned about their religious affiliation.²³ It is a city in need of the Gospel.

Approximately 14 miles north of Winston-Salem lies the city of Rural Hall, a quiet town of approximately three thousand people, settled in the late 1700’s as people moved into the area to be near the town of Bethania just a few miles away to the west. In the late 1800’s, a new missional movement came into the area, this time as part of the Restoration or Campbell Stone Movement born in the early 1800’s on the American Frontier. One of its earliest leaders, Barton Stone was a Presbyterian pastor who was part of the Cane Ridge Revival in 1801 and experienced there a sense of unity and purpose that went beyond denominational and regional boundaries. He began to lead this burgeoning movement that called themselves “Christians only” with no denomination ties and with a fierce determination to restore the church to its biblical roots without manmade constructs such as creeds or doctrinal statements. Later in the 1820’s he met father and son pastors, Alexander and Thomas Stone, who were from Baptist backgrounds and found that they had similar ideas, hopes, and visions. On January 1, 1832, Stone and the Campbells decided to formally join together bringing Stone’s “Christians” with the Campbell’s

²³ “Winston-Salem, North Carolina,” City-Data, accessed March 6, 2020, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Winston-Salem-North-Carolina.html>

“Disciples” to create something new. This new movement grew from about twenty-five thousand adherents to over two hundred thousand in 1861 to over seven million today.²⁴

It was out of this movement that a new church was planted in Rural Hall in 1880. That church, Jefferson Church of Christ started under a large oak tree on their current property. This small group of people had a vision for sharing the Gospel throughout the area and seeing new churches planted, churches that would reflect the values of the Restoration Movement. Over the years, churches were established in the communities of King, Poplar Springs, and also in the town limits of Rural Hall itself. Then this local church planting mission stopped and remained dormant for years.

In 2005, the Jefferson Church of Christ Board of Directors, made up of the Deacons and Elders began a series of meetings to pray and begin discussions on how to best reach the community with the Gospel. Church growth had been steady, and their existing facility was beginning to become a limiting factor for further growth. Several ideas were explored such as moving the church, building a new building, changing the name, adding new services, and the possibility of planting a new church in another area of the region. This new church would be designed to reach people who were far away from God and would be able to try new innovative methods that the current established church was not quite ready to try. After several months of research, prayer, discussion, and debate, it was decided that planting a new church would be the best way to reach the community, and the only one of the initiatives to pursue.

The Discipleship Pastor, Patrick Norris was chosen to lead this new effort, and he and his wife Stacey were sent to assessment to see if this was indeed where God was leading the church. The assessment team gave their recommendation that this couple should lead this new endeavor,

²⁴ “Restoration Movement,” Association of Religion Data Archives, accessed September 1, 2020, http://www.thearda.com/timeline/movements/movement_32.asp

and the work began in building a launch team of fifty people, thirty-five adults and fifteen children, hiring an associate pastor to assist in planning and leading worship, and acquiring the needed financing and resources. On the last Sunday of September 2007, this new church launched in a movie theater approximately seven miles from Rural Hall and less than two miles from the first Moravian settlement in the area, Bethabara.

The church began to grow almost immediately. The first Sunday saw over one hundred eighty people attend in a setting that most had never experienced for church, a movie theater with comfortable seats in a public, secular setting with contemporary music and a message that was simple and in a conversational style. After the initial first wave, the church settled into a weekly attendance just over one hundred but with new people attending each week. Enthusiasm was high and the people were excited. Over the next four years, the church grew to a weekly attendance average of one hundred fifty, experiencing ten percent growth yearly. Small Groups were set up to build community and disciple the people. Regular outreach events, which were creative and generally servant evangelism oriented, were held in the community, including several that were held in lieu of the Sunday morning services. People were inviting their friends and families, and there was a great sense of being part of a movement of God.

In 2009, the church started a food pantry and clothes closet to serve the local community in fulfillment of the parable of the sheep and goats as told by Jesus, who explained that when acts of service are given to the “least of these” they were in fact done for Him. The pantry grew and over time it was moved to a neighboring church, Shattalon Church of Christ, that had a large building that they were not using fully. Hundreds of families were served each month, and a program was begun to provide school children in a local Title One school, one with high levels of food insecure children, with food in backpacks for the weekend. Eventually, the three

ministries, the food pantry, clothes closet and “backpack” program became part of a nonprofit, Bridging the Gap, funded and led by members of the church.

However, there was a growing problem that came to a head in the summer of 2010. The church had launched with a large initial fundraising effort, and these monies were beginning to dwindle and the offerings, while good, were not enough to offset the draining of the funds. By May of 2010, it became apparent that there would need to be cuts in the staff salary and support. Ultimately, the Worship Pastor’s salary was reduced, and in order to provide for his family, he left to take on a full-time position in another state. The Children’s Ministry Director’s salary was also cut at that time. The church continued to grow through this time, but there was a noticeable decrease in enthusiasm and outreach efforts.

The following year, the movie theater chain made the decision to triple the lease agreement, and after several months, the leadership of the church decided to move from the theater to a local high school. This space was not nearly as inviting as the theater nor as accessible. It was about three miles from the former location, cold in the winter, hot in the summer and not in a great condition. Over the next two years, attendance and morale began to drop noticeably. The new worship leader was not a good fit for the church, the church was not a good fit for him or his wife, and soon they left. After two years at this school, the church leaders then decided to move to another school, an elementary school that was closer to the original location in the theater. Even with a better location, the church continued to decline in the weekly attendance until it reached a low of ninety-seven in 2016, a loss of forty percent. Enthusiasm was low. Outreach events were sporadic. People stopped inviting others. Leaders were tired and were experiencing discouragement. The missional temperature was dropping.

It was in this time that the desire for revitalization and missional resurgence was born. The leaders recognized the need for change and some steps were taken to begin to see the church move forward. A new prayer initiative was begun. After years of being mobile, the church leadership team made up of staff, elders, small group leaders, and ministry team leaders decided to begin a building campaign to raise money for the first church facility. Money was raised, a property was purchased, plans were designed but eventually, in 2019, an existing church facility came on the market and Bridges decided to purchase that facility. This facility is less than one mile from the Bethabara historical site, one mile from the church's original meeting site at the movie theater and two miles from the school where the church had been meeting. This has really helped the morale within the church, and the church grew up to the time of Covid-19 when services were moved online. However, a new building alone is not enough to create a missional resurgence. Other efforts would be required.

Problem Presented

The problem this project will address is the need for greater spiritual vibrancy and missional resurgence in Bridges Church. The church grew steadily by ten percent per year for her first four years. In year four, the church had to change venues from a movie theater to a school while at the same time having to lay off staff due to financial reasons. This began a five-year season of steep decline in attendance followed by three years of moderate growth. It is not just about attendance. In the first six years, the church experienced on average one baptism per month, but in the past five years, this has fallen to a total of four in five years. The number of small groups has remained static. Church members no longer invite others to attend worship services. Morale has fallen, weariness has set in and vitality is on the wane.

To many at the church, Bridges Church does not appear to be what could be considered a Vibrant Church and needs to discover a clear path to back to her roots, an intervention that will open doors for the Holy Spirit to work and bring real life to the church. back toward being missional, a disciple-making church full of life and vitality.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this Doctor of Ministry study is to discover effective pathways for the people of Bridges Church to become more spiritually vibrant with more love for God and others, and to be on mission to share that love of God with the community around them. It will require examining the spiritual condition of the members of the church through a robust church-wide survey and then the identification and implementation of essential interventions that will lead to greater missional effectiveness leading to vibrant growth. It is possible for churches to change and experience revitalization as they implement specific interventions designed to transform hearts, minds and attitudes, specifically in missional activities and processes that focus on making new and more vibrant disciples.

Basic Assumptions

There are some basic assumptions within this study. There is an assumption that spiritual vitality can be measured, qualified and quantified through surveying.

There is an assumption that the participants will honestly and thoroughly respond to each survey question.

There is an assumption that the survey respondents will participate in the corresponding interventions throughout the year-long process.

There is an assumption that other factors, such as the purchase of a new facility during the year-long process will not unduly affect the results in the follow up survey.

There is an assumption that the majority of people who participated in the first survey will also participate in the follow up survey the following year.

There is an assumption that as individual members of Bridges Church move toward greater Christ-Centeredness, the church as a whole will also move toward greater vibrancy as the church is made up of her individual members.

Definitions:

Archetypes: “Archetypes are one of the most recent findings from the REVEAL dataset. They bring together the Best Practice Principles and the spiritual growth catalysts. There are eight archetypes, which are patterns or personality types that represent similarities between churches. The archetypes are: Troubled, Complacent, Introverted, Extroverted, Average, Energized, Self-Motivated, and Vibrant. The purpose of the archetypes is to help churches use their REVEAL results to understand what the best next step is for their church to move toward greater vibrancy.”²⁵

Church Revitalization: “... the effort to restore by biblical means a once healthy church from the present level of disease to a state of spiritual health, as defined by the Word of God.”²⁶

Missional: “Being missional conveys the idea of living on a purposeful, Biblical mission. Mission is the reason the church exists, and the church joins Jesus on mission. And, this mission is from everywhere to everywhere.”²⁷

²⁵ Key Concepts from Reveal,” Reveal for Church, accessed March 3, 2020, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5728d36e4d088eb3ad981105/t/5963d62ef5e231b8acbeaaed/1499715118716/Episode+2+Glossary+Podcast+Notes.pdf>

²⁶ Davis, p. 20.

²⁷ Why Defining Missional Matters,” Christianity Today: The Exchange,” accessed March 3, 2020, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/july/why-defining-missional-matters.html>

Plateaued or Declining Church: A church that “had plateaued and/or declined for five years (worship attendance grew less than 10 percent in a five-year period.”²⁸

The Spiritual Continuum: “The spiritual continuum consists of four categories along the road of spiritual maturity: Exploring Christ, Growing in Christ, Close to Christ, and Christ-Centered.”²⁹

Vibrancy: “... the meaning of the word vibrant – full of life – perfectly captures the dynamic, spiritually effervescent nature of these churches.”³⁰

Spiritual Growth Catalysts: Catalysts in science are things that help chemical reactions happen more quickly. Spiritual growth catalysts are the things that help people move forward along the spiritual continuum. For each movement, the key catalysts are: From Exploring Christ to Growing in Christ: core Christian beliefs - From Growing in Christ to Close to Christ: personal spiritual practices - From Close to Christ to Christ-Centered: faith-in-action.”³¹

Limitations and Delimitations

In this project there will be several limitations and constraints imposed on the results due to the nature of using the REVEAL for Churches online survey as a research tool. They include but are not limited to the following:

Respondents will be self-reporting to over one hundred questions regarding their spiritual life and practices. While the survey will be anonymous, those taking the survey may still want to appear more spiritually mature than they are. There may be a desire to over report their spiritual

²⁸ Davis, 19.

²⁹ “Key Concepts from Reveal,” Reveal for Church, accessed March 3, 2020, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5728d36e4d088eb3ad981105/t/5963d62ef5e231b8acbeaaed/1499715118716/Episode+2+Glossary+Podcast+Notes.pdf>

³⁰ Parkinson and Scammacca-Lewis, *Rise*, 133.

³¹ “Key Concepts from Reveal,” Reveal for Church, accessed March 3, 2020, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5728d36e4d088eb3ad981105/t/5963d62ef5e231b8acbeaaed/1499715118716/Episode+2+Glossary+Podcast+Notes.pdf>

practices. There may be a desire to overstate their satisfaction with the church to keep from hurting feelings. There may be a desire to report where they want to be as opposed to where they are spiritually. Self-reporting has inherent issues that will affect the overall results of the research.

As part of this project, the respondents will be resurveyed in the following year to see what changes if any will have occurred due to the intervention implemented in the church based on the first survey. During that year, some respondents may leave the church or be absent for the second survey for a number of reasons. New people will enter the church after the first survey has been completed. This will affect the results. While the second survey will be limited to only those who have participated in the intervention, that may create other issues. There is also the possibility that some people will experience spiritual growth due to other experiences beyond the implemented intervention during that same period of time, making it difficult to ascertain if the intervention was effective. By creating a project designed to survey a specific church congregation in context, implementing an intervention and resurveying the participants in a year's time has these inherent limitations.

There will be a two-week time constraint placed on the survey by the REVEAL for Churches methodology. This will limit some from taking the survey due to their own schedules. While the researchers at REVEAL for Churches have found that two weeks is an ideal time to generate enough responses in most contexts, it may limit who can participate. In order to facilitate a higher participation rate during these two weeks, there will be multiple reminders and communications to the congregation using social media, emails, and announcements.

REVEAL for Churches is an online survey and while electronic devices will be made available on Sunday mornings in 2019 for those who do not have access to one on their own, this

may limit who is willing to take the survey. In 2020, with Covid-19 restrictions, there cannot be any onsite survey opportunities. All surveys must be online. REVEAL for Churches does not supply or allow paper surveys. Those who are not comfortable with technology or who want a more private way of taking the survey may decide not to participate. The length of the survey and expected fifteen to twenty-minute time for completion may deter others from participating. Volunteers will be available to help people on Sunday mornings to take the survey and make it more accessible to those without electronic devices to help alleviate these issues.

The survey itself will have limitations based on the type of questions asked and the definition of what it means to be Christ-centered derived by the originators of the survey. Within the REVEAL for Churches framework, the expectation for each church is that they will discover where they are on a continuum from Troubled Church to Vibrant Church based on the responses of the individual church members and their individual degree of Christ-centeredness. This project will be dependent on the validity of the methodology and conclusions of the survey creators in determining the validity of the results for this particular church context. Therefore, the inherent biases of the REVEAL for Churches research will be reflected in the results of this particular project and research.

Bridges Church is a smaller church, which will limit the sample size. The REVEAL for Churches survey is designed to have the most valid results with a minimum of eighty participants. This may prove difficult to attain in this context where the average weekly attendance is ninety-seven adults. Even at that level, this will still be a small sample size, which will affect the results. This will also make it difficult to make generalizations for other contexts based on the results of this research.

While there are many limitations to this study, great care will be taken to address them when possible. The inherent issues in this project are not insurmountable and an effective project is expected to produce real results that will direct an effective intervention that will bring greater vibrancy to the church.

This research project will contain several delimitations. It will focus on the spiritual vitality and practices of those eighteen years or older who are regular attenders of Bridges Church. It will not include those from other churches or those under eighteen years of age. It will not include those who may be visiting the church at the time of the survey nor will it include those who used to attend on a regular basis. For the second survey, scheduled for after the completion of an intervention and one year from the time of the first survey, those who did not participate in the intervention will not be included. These delimitations will help focus the research.

There will not be a control group to compare with those who participated in the survey and intervention. While this may have been a way to help clarify the effectiveness of the intervention, it is beyond the range of this project. Using the survey before and after the intervention will be a way to assess the intervention without using a control group.

This research will reflect only the degree vibrancy of a single church at a particular point in time. The context for this church is a non-denominational church plant, less than fifteen years old, in a county of approximately three hundred fifty thousand in the southern state of North Carolina in the years between 2019 and 2020. However, the REVEAL for Churches survey has been used in thousands of churches and will be a reliable tool to help produce results that may benefit other churches in similar contexts. The delimitations will help focus the research to assist

this particular church address specific issues and be able to better implement new practices to aid in growing toward greater vibrancy.

Thesis Statement

If Bridges Church as a whole and as individual members can grow toward greater Christ centeredness, become more spiritually vibrant, and intentionally missional in making more and more vibrant disciples, she can experience greater vitality and growth.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Chapter Two addresses the question, “Why is this problem being addressed?” Church revitalization is not a new problem and can be, in fact, traced back to the very first century, to the very first churches. It did not take long for these first churches to begin to lose their way and begin to lose life. This problem has persisted throughout the history of the church, and now threatens the very heart of the church in North America. After years of church growth in the United States and Canada, churches began to plateau, decline, and die, becoming an alarming trend.³² People are leaving the church, and America is falling behind India and China in the number of people who identify and Christians.³³ As it is, church attendance is falling behind population growth, and it continues get worse.³⁴ At the same time, churches are more shallow, disciples are not growing as deep, and leaders are chasing crowds instead of building followers of Jesus. The problem is not that the church is asking too much of people but too little.³⁵ With the Covid-19 crisis, there is even greater danger to churches. Before the pandemic, approximately twenty churches were closing their doors each day, but due to social, economic, and health factors, many more churches may find themselves in danger of closing for good.³⁶

It is not just the churches as a whole that are in decline. The individuals who make up these churches, the Christians of North America, are not much different than non-Christians in behavior and lifestyle, including such areas as divorce rate, viewing pornography, racist

³² Reeder, *From Embers to a Flame*, 7, 8.

³³ Craig Etheridge, *Bold Moves: Lead the Church to Live Like Jesus* (Colleyville, TX: discipleFIRST, 2016), 7.

³⁴ Malphurs and Penrod, *ReVision*, 21, 22.

³⁵ J.T. English, *Deep Discipleship: How the Church Can Make Whole Disciples of Jesus* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2020), chapter 1.

³⁶ “Preparing for Revitalization in a Post Covid-19 World,” Church Answers Featuring Thom Ranier, accessed November 4, 2020, <https://churchanswers.com/webinars/preparing-for-revitalization-in-a-post-covid-world/>

tendencies, domestic violence, drug and alcohol issues, and money use.³⁷ In many ways, declining and dying churches lack real spiritual life because the individual members of these churches are not experiencing the transformational power of Christ in their lives, and they are not experiencing this power in part because the churches are not helping or leading them to do so. The church is asking too little of her members, not too much.³⁸

Churches will be seeking help and guidance in the years to come in not only reversing the trends of plateau and decline, but also in moving from merely surviving to thriving. That is what revitalization is all about. It is a subject that should be reexamined on a regular basis, across the years as culture, context, and generations change. Revitalization will be a subject for constant study and application until Christ returns.

Literature Review

With the plethora of materials on the subject of revitalization, this study will focus on the key elements and components that make revitalization possible in a local church. These include a clear definition of revitalization and how to measure “success” in a revitalization project, the role of leadership throughout the process, the necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit and prayer, the importance of Word of God in promoting spiritual growth and vitality, and the critical role of adopting a missional focus leading to organizing the church around the process of making disciples. Ultimately, revitalization will be seen as built around a return to having a heart for God, a love for people, both inside the church and those yet to be reached, and a passion for God’s ongoing mission to restore those who are lost to a right relationship with Him.

³⁷ Jim Putnam and Bobby Harrington with Robert Coleman, *Discipleship: Five Steps that Help Your Church To Make Disciples who Make Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 20.

³⁸ J.T. English, *Deep Discipleship*, Introduction.

Revitalization Defined

Simply defined, to revitalize means “to give new life to.”³⁹ In a church context, it speaks more directly of the spiritual life in a local church body. Revitalization is more than simply renovating a building, adding programs, changing music styles, or employing new or additional staff members. It is different than revitalizing a business and bringing it back from closure or bankruptcy. It is even different than simply growing in numbers. While Lee Kricher defines church revitalization as the following, “The process needed to turn a declining church into a growing church,”⁴⁰ it is more than that. It is a matter of moving a church from spiritual weakness to spiritual strength, becoming stronger in the spiritual practices that foster spiritual health, with a greater love for God and for others.⁴¹

As stated earlier, Andrew Davis defines revitalization as “The effort to restore by biblical means a once healthy church from a present level of disease to a state of spiritual health, as defined by the word of God,”⁴² leaving “spiritual health” and “disease” to be defined. Brian Croft focuses on the process of revitalization when he writes that “A church is revitalized by the power of God through the Spirit of God at work through the word of God by means of a faithful shepherd of God,”⁴³ Croft being more interested in the spiritual aspects of revitalization over the purely numerical. Thom Rainer and Daniel Akin use biblical qualities associated with the early churches found in the letter to the Ephesians and the book of Acts to state that a “Healthy,

³⁹ “Revitalize,” accessed November 4, 2020, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/revitalization?s=t>

⁴⁰ Lee Kricher, *For a New Generation: A Practical Guide for Revitalizing Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 20.

⁴¹ Parkinson and Scammaca-Lewis, *Rise*, Chapter 1.

⁴² Davis, *Revitalize*, 20.

⁴³ Brian Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying and Divided Churches* (Glasgow, Great Britain: Bell and Bain, 2016), 24.

vibrant church is characterized by having unity, diversity, ministry and maturity,”⁴⁴ a healthy, vibrant church being the goal of revitalization.

In writing about what they call comeback churches, another way to classify revitalized churches, Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson state that, “Comeback leaders know that change takes place as the church is renewed spiritually. The motto of the Welsh Revival was, ‘Mend a church, save the world.’”⁴⁵ Revitalization results from the congregation experiencing overall positive growth in their spiritual lives. They further write that this spiritual renewal consists of three elements, “spiritual energy in the lives of individual believers and the church family as a whole, brought about by revival . . . the church is restructured around its missional purpose, . . . there’s a long-term commitment to change.”⁴⁶ Here begins a more substantial understanding of revitalization. It is a spiritual renewal but also a rededication to the mission of the church as the church begins to make real, internal change to create a greater external focus. According to Reeder, “All of the strategies for church revitalization find their source, and their greatest expression, in the last words of Jesus to His disciples.”⁴⁷ As the church moves toward significant spiritual and missional renewal, deeper revitalization can occur. It is a matter of having a greater heart for God and the things of God, and a greater heart for His mission. Revitalization is a renewal of the heart, and every church must take a unique approach to how it can be accomplished within their own unique context, based on their own unique personality.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Thom S. Rainer and Daniel L. Akin, *Vibrant Church: Becoming a Healthy Church in the 21st Century* (Nashville, TN: Lifeway Church Resources, 2008), 134.

⁴⁵ Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 200 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2007), 54.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 54, 55.

⁴⁷ Reeder, *From Embers to a Flame*, 195.

⁴⁸ Walton R. Kendell. “Pursuing Revitalization That Is Tailored To A Church’s Unique Personality.” (Doctrinal diss., Covenant Theological Seminary, 2014), 7, Theological Research Exchange Network.

Because revitalization is a heart issue, the focus of revitalization efforts must be directed toward the hearts of the people who make up that church. Kevin Harney writes that, “If a congregation is gripped by God’s love and lavishes it freely on each other and their community, God will draw people to this church. God is the one who draws people and softens hearts. He is also the one who will stop spiritually curious people from coming to a church that will not introduce them to the amazing grace and love of Jesus.”⁴⁹ God is the one who grows a church and does so in response to the hearts of the people. Individual hearts that form a collective heart in a church must be in line with the heart of God for Him to work. Harney continues to write that, “This means we need to do a spiritual check on our congregation’s heart. Does our heart, as a church, beat with the love and compassion of the living God?”⁵⁰ Church revitalization starts with the hearts of the people.

For a church in search of revitalization, there are some real questions she must ask herself, questions that deal with the condition of the heart and actions in the lives of the people and the leaders. Hawkins and Parkinson suggest these questions might be stated as, “How are we really doing? How much impact is our church making on people’s lives? Are they closer to Christ? Do they exhibit more love and compassion? Are they more like Jesus in word and deed?”⁵¹ Ultimately, the goals of any church revitalization efforts should be based on getting the hearts of the people in line with God’s purposes. Again, Hawkins and Parkinson write that, “The purpose of our churches – our commission, as church leaders – is to help the people of our congregations to become disciples who obey Jesus by loving God and loving others.”⁵² If

⁴⁹ Kevin Harney, *Organic Outreach for Churches: Infusing Evangelistic Passion into Your Congregation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 18.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵¹ Hawkins and Parkinson, *Move*, 13, 14.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 12.

churches focus on the growth of the spiritual lives of individual congregants the church as a whole will experience this growth. Ed Stetzer and Thom Ranier write in *Transformation Churches: Creating a New Scorecard for Congregations* that, “As Christ is formed in individuals, the same Christ is formed in a church.”⁵³ Build Christ in the hearts of the people and Christ is built in the church, and as their spiritual roots go deep into Christ, the spiritual roots of the church will go deep into Christ. (Col 2:6,7)

Key Component: Leadership

The process of revitalization is built around several key components, without which, it is not possible for the church to experience new life. Some components are more critical than others, and in this research, only the core elements will be examined. At the forefront of revitalization is pastoral leadership.⁵⁴ According to churches who had experienced revitalization, leadership was considered the most important factor of all.⁵⁵ Someone must begin the process of examination of the heart of the church, identify the key problems, set a course for renewal, and actually lead the process to completion.⁵⁶ Leadership is crucial because without good leadership, revitalization will not happen.⁵⁷ In clarifying the role of a leader, Harry Reeder writes that, “A leader influences others to effectively achieve a defined mission together.”⁵⁸ Revitalization is a mission that requires the efforts of everyone in the church, and the efforts must be coordinated

⁵³ Ed Stetzer and Thom Ranier, *Transformational Church: Creating a New Scorecard for Churches* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2010), 74.

⁵⁴ Jarvis Baker, “Leadership Matters: The Process of Leading a Declining Church To Revitalization Utilizing Early Church Principles.” (Doctrinal thesis, Liberty University, 2018), 12, Digital Commons.

⁵⁵ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 34.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁵⁷ Reeder, *From Embers to a Flame*, 117.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

and moving in the same direction with the same vision, because as Malphurs and Penhold write, “Leadership is a key to success or failure of a given enterprise.”⁵⁹

Revitalization starts in the heart of the leader. A leader can only lead others from where they are and to where they are willing to go.⁶⁰ A vibrant church requires a vibrant leader. Stetzer and Ranier write that, “Vibrant leaders lead their people to worship, live in community and live on mission, Transformational Churches are led by transformational leaders who are being transformed in the presence of the people they lead.”⁶¹ They are whom they are asking the church to be. Leaders of vibrant churches must be willing to surrender every decision to Christ and be filled with humility and transparency, and above all they must be Christ-centered.⁶² As a Christ-centered leader, they will live out what they are preaching and teaching.⁶³ Others will see that they live out the mission of Jesus as their hearts are aligned with His.⁶⁴ Leadership is about setting an example, and in revitalization it is important for the people to see what they will become modeled in the life of the leader.⁶⁵ As a leader, they will have the heart of a shepherd, caring for the church, demonstrating a sacrificial love for those they lead, and they understand that they will be accountable for their efforts as a leader.⁶⁶ When the leader’s heart and life are in a right relationship with Christ, they will be able to lead a church through revitalization.⁶⁷

Vision is a key tool for the leader. It is imperative that the leader knows where they are leading and why. In *Revision: The Key to Transforming Your Church*, Aubrey Malphurs and Gordon Penfold write that, “To attempt to attempt a revitalization of a church without a clear,

⁵⁹ Malphurs and Penhold, *Re:Vision*, 26.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁶¹ Stetzer and Ranier, *Transformational Church*, 73.

⁶² Parkinson and Scammaca-Lewis, *Rise*, 7.

⁶³ Hawkins and Parkinson, *Move*, 250.

⁶⁴ McIntosh, *There’s Hope for Your Church*, 38.

⁶⁵ Reeder, *From Embers to a Flame*, chapter 6.

⁶⁶ Stuart, *Church Revitalization from the Inside Out*, 28.

⁶⁷ Hawkins and Parkinson, *Move*, chapter 16.

compelling vision from God is like asking a surgeon to operate without a scalpel or a carpenter to build without a hammer.”⁶⁸ Having a clear vision, communicated clearly and often is the role and responsibility of the leader. The people must know where they are going and what is required. Vision communicated well gives direction, provides motivation, creates energy, fosters sacrifice, develops faith, and sustains ongoing change efforts.⁶⁹ Malphurs and Penfold state that, “Vision is a clear, exciting picture of God’s future for your ministry as you believe it can and must be.”⁷⁰ However, it is not just a dream the leader determines based on their own passions, ideas, preferences, or what they observe other churches doing. The vision must be based on God’s Word and the timeless truths of God, inspired by God’s Spirit, applied by faith, and embedded in the hearts of the people.⁷¹

To lead a church through a process of revitalization, the leader will need courage. Change is difficult in any context, but perhaps even more so in a church setting where spiritual forces will rise up in opposition.⁷² Andrew Davis writes from experience that, “No dying church will ever be revitalized without courage, for Satan never gives up territory without a fight.”⁷³ Leaders must face their fears of confrontation, failure, and inadequacy. It will not be an easy process to endure.⁷⁴

Patience, perseverance and endurance are also key attributes of a leader in the revitalization of a church. Revitalization is a long process and may take years, as real spiritual fruit does not come quickly. A leader must be willing to stay in place to see the process through

⁶⁸ Malphurs and Penrod, *Revision*, 147.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* chapter 10.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁷¹ Davis, *Revitalize*, Chapter 8.

⁷² Stuart, *Church Revitalization from the Inside Out*, 20.

⁷³ Davis, *Revitalize*, 129.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, chapter 10.

to completion. They must avoid giving in and giving up. They must be in it for the long haul.⁷⁵ God does not work on our timetables, and He is the source of true transformation, which takes time. A leader must be willing to wait on God. Andrew Davis simply writes that, “No church revitalization can be effective without a great deal of patience.”⁷⁶

Dependance on God is developed over time in a leader’s ongoing relationship with Him. Dependence is a learned by experienced quality and is vital to experiencing true revitalization. A leader realizes that only God can bring life to a dying church. It is not something they can do on their own. They need God. Davis writes “For what is church revitalization but the supernatural work of God in raising a church from the dead? If you approach church revitalization looking at your own strength – your wisdom, technique, verbal skills, reasoning, winsome personality, people skills, shrewdness, or even revitalization experience at some other church – you are being self-reliant. On God, and God alone, you must set your hope.”⁷⁷ This is one very defining way that church revitalization is different than revitalizing a business, town, or neighborhood. Only God can bring new life to a church. Revitalization leaders rely on this. Croft states that, “If we truly believe that God is the one who breathes life into a dying church, not our clever schemes in the church, we better make sure we find ourselves on our knees crying out to the Chief Shepherd who loves our church more than we do.”⁷⁸ Therefore, to see a successful revitalization effort, the leader must learn to rely on God and turn to Him in dependent prayer throughout the process.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, Chapter 3.

⁷⁶ Davis, *Revitalize*, 139.

⁷⁷ Davis, *Revitalize*, 73.

⁷⁸ Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 46.

⁷⁹ Reeder, *From Embers to a Flame*, 76.

Key Components: The Holy Spirit and Prayer

If dependence on God is essential for transformation to occur, it is because new life in a church is the work of the Holy Spirit in that church. A church recognizes that fact through prayer which is the key means of partnering with the Holy Spirit. Andrew Davis stresses what he learned through his own experience in revitalization when he writes that, “A Scripture-based, Spirit-led, passionate, prevailing prayer by an increasing number of church members is God’s ordained means for the revitalization of a church.”⁸⁰ The importance of a church looking to the Holy Spirit in prayer for the power to bring change cannot be emphasized enough. The temptation to work under one’s own strength, ideas and methods alone is strong but must be avoided. Davis again provides guidance here in stating that, “Spirit-led prayer has two effects, and both of them are essential to church revitalization. The first is reasonable; the second is mysterious. First, prayer changes us. Second, prayer changes things.”⁸¹ When the church prays it does not force God’s Hand to do what is wanted. Instead, prayer is what brings a church together in alignment with God’s will and work.⁸² The act of prayer alone brings spiritual change, and one of the effects of spiritual change is greater prayer. They feed off each other.⁸³

The Holy Spirit is the change agent in revitalization. He alone can do all that needs to be done in the lives of people to bring lasting and real change. Mark Clifton and Kenneth Priest in *Rubicons of Revitalization: Overcoming 8 Common Barriers to Church Renewal* write that, “Only the activity of God through the Holy Spirit can regenerate hearts and bring people from

⁸⁰ Davis, *Revitalize*, 100.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 98, 99.

⁸² David L. Watson and Paul D. Watson, *Contagious Disciple Making: Leading Others on a Journey of Discovery* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2014), 84.

⁸³ Thom S. Ranier, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Your Alive* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 2014), 66.

death to life. Without a shadow of a doubt, only the Holy Spirit can revitalize a church.”⁸⁴

Church leaders can bring all manner of change to a church, but unless the changes are inspired by the Holy Spirit and born out of their times in prayer, they will not be sufficient to bring real change. The church needs God to move through the power of the Holy Spirit to bring new life, and God moves in response to the prayers of His people.⁸⁵ Dependence on prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit is a defining quality of churches that have experienced new vitality⁸⁶ and a new commitment to the mission of God.⁸⁷ When churches really pray, God hears and works through the Holy Spirit, new spiritual fruit begins to grow, and a church is reborn.

Key Component: The Word of God

Vibrant churches embed the Bible in everything they do.⁸⁸ They teach the Bible in the worship services, often in expository preaching. They incorporate the Word in every meeting, gathering, and small group gathering, whether that is Sunday School or in-home groups.⁸⁹ They rely on the Word of God in decision making and in planning. They recognize the inherent power in the Word of God to change lives. They see that the early church relied on the Word and that their growth, spiritual and numerical, can be traced to their adherence to the Word. Leaders of revitalization understand that if this was the way of the early church, it should be the same for them as well.⁹⁰ While there are a multitude of resources available to church revitalizers, nothing is remotely as effective as the Word. Andrew Davis writes that, “The Word alone will revitalize

⁸⁴ Mark Clifton and Kenneth Priest, *Rubicons of Revitalization: Overcoming 8 Common Barriers to Church Renewal* (Littleton, CO: Acoma Press, 2018), 23.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, chapter 1

⁸⁶ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 68-71.

⁸⁷ Stetzer and Ranier, *Transformational Church*, 125.

⁸⁸ Hawkins and Parkinson, *Move*, Chapter 13.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 223.

⁹⁰ Reeder, *From Embers to a Flame*, 98.

a church if it is to be revitalized. The more the revitalizing leaders trust the Word of God alone, the more powerful their efforts will be.”⁹¹

One of the most powerful tools a church revitalizer can utilize is preaching, specifically preaching the Word of God and the Gospel message.⁹² Preaching is more than giving a life-affirming message that inspires and uplifts. It is teaching the Word of God in partnership with the Holy Spirit who brings power to convict, challenge, motivate, and correct the church. In the end, revitalizing leaders want their people to love and live the Word of God, and through their preaching seek to lead their people to do so. Reflecting back through his ministry, Mark Clifton concludes, “I’ve come to believe with all of my heart that the preaching of the Word of God effectively revitalizes a church. It’s not all you need to do in revitalization. You’ll need to pray, evangelize, serve the community, make disciples and everything else you’re reading in this book. All of the flows form effectual preaching of God’s Word.”⁹³ Through God’s Word and power, the church finds vibrant life.⁹⁴

Key Component: Missional Resurgence

How one sees and understands the church affects how one sees and understands what it means to revitalize a specific local church. If one sees the church as an institution, rather than a gathering of followers of Jesus, that will affect their understanding of what it means to bring life to this organization. If, however, one views the church as the people who make it up, the followers of Jesus Christ, they will understand the church on a different level, a level that

⁹¹ Davis, *Revitalize*, 78.

⁹² Clifton and Priest, *Rubicons*, Chapter 2.

⁹³ Clifton and Priest, *Rubicons*, 31.

⁹⁴ Hawkins and Parkinson, *Move*, Chapter 13.

includes and in fact emphasizes the missional nature of the church.⁹⁵ The people are the church, a church on mission. Writing about this missional church, Reggie McNeal states that, “The missional church is an expression of God’s heart. It serves as an indication of his continuing commitment to his redemptive mission in the world. Because God is on mission, the people of God are too. God is a sending God. Just as he sent his Son and His Holy Spirit to the world, he is sending his people into the world.”⁹⁶

So, when a church loses her way and strays from her mission, life begins to drain from the church. Without a mission to live for, people begin to live for other things, based on their own needs and preferences. Unhealthy churches turn inward, neglecting the *mission dei* and lose their spiritual vitality.⁹⁷ A church that lives only for herself and not for the purposes of God, will not be in a right frame of heart to receive the power of God. Such a church will begin to die, and while it may take time, the ultimate result is the death of the church. Thom Ranier addresses this in writing that, “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. Perhaps I’m being too gentle to say the deceased church ‘forgot’ to act upon the Great Commission. Perhaps it is more accurate to say the church ‘decided’ not to act upon Christ’s command.”⁹⁸ It does not take much for a church to lose sight of the mission. Any problem faced by the church and sometimes even good opportunities have the potential to pull the church away from her mission and to lose the life that comes with purpose from that mission.⁹⁹ Churches may

⁹⁵ Reggie McNeal, *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009), chapter 2.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 20, 21.

⁹⁷ Michael Wesley Richardson. “Transforming Mission Culture in Church Revitalization: A Mixed Methods Study.” (Doctrinal thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020), 4, ProQuest Dissertation Publishing, 2020.

⁹⁸ Ranier, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 41.

⁹⁹ Stuart, *Church Revitalization from the Inside Out*, 197.

choose another mission to pursue as first priority, be it pastoral care, worship, family ministry, core activities, existing programs, traditions that have lost their meaning or other distractions. There may not be anything wrong or evil about whatever it may be, it simply is not the core mission though.¹⁰⁰ To find new life again, the church, the followers of Jesus, must reengage with the mission of God to redeem the world.

To find that new life as a church, it is important to return to the mission of the church. It should flow out of our love for God and should compel us to “love those He loves.”¹⁰¹ Dann Spader in *4 Chair Discipling: Growing a Movement of Disciple-Makers*, writes that, “There is no better way to rediscover passion for the life we’ve been given than to return to the point where Jesus first passed the torch to His disciples. Understanding what He said in that pivotal moment will enable us to clearly understand our mission in this life.”¹⁰² That moment, when Jesus passed the torch to His followers occurred as Jesus commanded them to go and make disciples of all the earth, what is commonly called the Great Commission. He promised to be with them as they went, being on mission together with the living Christ. He called them to a new life with Him. That call, to make disciples, is the mission and purpose of the church.¹⁰³

A key understanding of the mission to make disciples is that it has two pieces, equally important. One is the call to help people far from God to hear the Gospel and respond to Christ. This is generally referred to as evangelism. The second piece is then guiding this person into greater spiritual maturity. This is generally called discipleship. They are two parts of the same whole. Disciple making involves the whole process, from helping people make the decision to

¹⁰⁰ Malphurs, *Strategic Disciple Making*, 16.

¹⁰¹ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 99, 100.

¹⁰² Dann Spader, *4 Chair Discipling: Growing a Movement of Disciple-Makers* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 34.

¹⁰³ Etheridge, *Bold Moves*, 8.

follow Jesus to helping them grow as followers of Jesus to be more like Him. They are two sides of the same coin.¹⁰⁴ Malphurs puts it this way, “From a discipleship perspective, the church’s mission involves both making disciples (evangelism) and maturing them (edification).”¹⁰⁵ Disciple making involves the whole process, from conversion to maturity. It is in the process of making disciples, mature and devoted followers of Jesus that a church is revitalized. As the individuals grow to be like Jesus and full of His life, the church as a whole will do the same, as the church is simply made up of individuals.¹⁰⁶

The question to be answered is then, “What is a disciple?” Bill Hull defines a disciple in this way, stating that, “The Greek word for disciple – mathetes – means learner, pupil, someone who learns by following.”¹⁰⁷ This definition does not address the fuller meaning of the word. Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey describe a disciple as someone who has abandoned the things of this world and has chosen to follow Jesus. They live sacrificial, relational and transformational lives.¹⁰⁸ They write that, “A disciple is a person who has trusted Christ for salvation and has surrendered fully to Him. He or she is committed to practicing the spiritual disciplines in community and developing to their full potential for Christ and His mission.”¹⁰⁹ They include the full process of disciple making, going from conversion to maturity and on to living on mission. David and Paul Watson frame the question about what makes a disciple around the difference between a disciple and a convert. They write that, “Making disciples is about having a relationship with Christ that results in a lifestyle of obedience to Christ’s commands, which

¹⁰⁴ Bill Hull, *Conversion & Discipleship: You Can’t Have One Without the Other* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), chapter 1.

¹⁰⁵ Malphurs, *Strategic Disciple Making*, 178.

¹⁰⁶ McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, 19.

¹⁰⁷ Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ Disciple Maker: Rediscovering Jesus’ Strategy for Building His Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1984), 10.

¹⁰⁸ Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 2013), 22-27.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

requires disciples to make more disciples. Making converts is about adhering to the doctrine of a particular faction, church, denomination, sect, or religion.”¹¹⁰ Here, they do a number of things. First, they equate a disciple to one with a personal relationship with Jesus, not just a set of beliefs. Next they tie this relationship to obedience to Christ which is an expression of love. Finally, they draw the conclusion that this personal relationship with Jesus will result in the continuation of the mission, as they become disciples who make disciples. As people are trained, equipped and grow as disciples they begin to live on mission, a result of a life-giving relationship with Christ. As disciples are made in a church, they in turn will make more disciples, who will continue the process, and with each new disciple comes the life that comes with the mission.

In defining what a disciple is, it is important to frame it around a relationship with Jesus. In *Bold Moves: Lead the Church to Live Like Jesus*, Craig Etheridge posits that a disciple is in simplest terms, a learner, but ultimately, a student of Jesus and in a personal relationship with Him that is life transforming.¹¹¹ This relationship begins with devotion to Jesus, born out of the new life found in conversion, a turning from sin and a turning to Jesus through repentance and belief. In understanding of the great sacrifice that makes this possible, the new disciple devotes themselves fully and completely to Christ in love and surrender.¹¹² This disciple begins to grow and develop to become like Christ in character and competencies, becoming more and more Christ-centered and Christ-controlled.¹¹³ Finally, this disciple is deployed by Jesus to make more disciples, wherever they may go. The mission is transferred then from disciple to disciple as each is deployed by Christ.¹¹⁴ This leads to a fuller definition of a disciple to become the following: A

¹¹⁰ Watson and Watson, *Contagious Disciple Making*, 48.

¹¹¹ Etheridge, *Bold Moves*, 48-54.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 54-57.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 57-62.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 62-65.

disciple is someone who is devoted to, developing in, and deployed by Jesus.¹¹⁵ This is the working definition of a disciple now employed by Bridges Church.

Missional resurgence is then about the church focusing on making disciples, from converts to people on a mission to make more disciples, disciples who make disciples.¹¹⁶ Churches that are most fully on mission have established simple, clear, and effective pathways for this process to occur.¹¹⁷ More than programs, classes, and church activities, a discipleship pathway relies on a process to help change the behavior of individuals, helping them to take ownership of their own growth in Christ. It is giving them tools and guided direction in moving toward greater surrender to Jesus, becoming Christ-centered.¹¹⁸ This process empowers the people, equips them, and holds them accountable for growth.¹¹⁹ Vibrant churches have a pathway for making disciples and make it an integral part of the church. Church leaders promote the pathway in membership classes, they preach it, they encourage people to enter it, they build leaders through it, and they model it. There are many different models being utilized in churches around the world for making disciples based on context, giftedness and history, but all have in common the ownership of the mission by the people of the church, the mission of Jesus Christ to make disciples who make disciples, disciples who are devoted to Christ and His mission.¹²⁰ As J.T. English writes, “Success in ministry is not found in building programs but in building disciples – disciples who love God with all of their heart, soul, strength and mind. (Luke 10:27). Christ is the goal, not better or more impressive ministries.”¹²¹ This is what drives missional resurgence in churches in need of revitalization.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., chapter 2.

¹¹⁶ Putnam and Harrington, *Discipleshift*, chapter 1.

¹¹⁷ Hawkins and Parkinson, *Move*, 213.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 213.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., chapter 14.

¹²⁰ Watson and Watson, *Contagious Disciple Making*, chapter 8.

¹²¹ English, *Deep Discipleship*, 17.

Theological Foundations

Mankind was created to be in a right relationship with God. The Scriptures point to the history of this relationship beginning and ending in a garden, with the tree of life present and God in right relationship with mankind.¹²² This right relationship began in the Garden of Eden and is presented as the intended state for God and humankind for eternity as recorded in the book of Revelation. The Apostle John writes, “And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God’” (Rev 21:2,3). This is the fulfillment of all that God has been pursuing with mankind. He will dwell with them as their God, and they will be His people. The word “dwell” is a translation of the word “tabernacle” and connects back to the time of Exodus when God “tabernacled” with the people and covenanted with them to be their God and for them to be His people.¹²³ God’s desire to be in a right relationship with mankind is repeated throughout the Scriptures (Lev 26:11-12; Jer 31:33; 32:38; Ezek 37:27; 2 Cor 6:16) at various times throughout Biblical times. God pursues mankind, mankind sins and turns away from God, and then God reaches out again. His desire is driven by His love for mankind. The prophet Jeremiah writes, “The Lord appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you” (Jer 31:3). God’s love is everlasting and is the bedrock of this right relationship. He seeks for mankind to love Him in return in response to His love, creating a relationship that is mutual and reciprocal.

¹²² Fred D. Howard, *1, 2, & 3 John, Jude, Revelation*, vol. 24, *Layman’s Bible Book Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Publishing, 1982), 135, 136.

¹²³ Kendell H. Easley, *Revelation*, vol. 12, *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1998) 394, 395.

When asked what the greatest commandment was, Jesus referred to the Shema, the commandment above all commandments. “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all of your heart and with all of your soul and all your might” (Deut 6:4,5). Stuart Weber comments that Jesus identified this as “The first and greatest commandment. This commandment was the greatest because of the statement in Deuteronomy 6:4 which preceded it: ‘Yahweh is your God, Yahweh alone’ (paraphrased). To honor Yahweh as the one true God is to love him exclusively, from among all others who claim to be gods.”¹²⁴ God commanded His people to love Him, with all they were and all they had. It was a total commitment to Him, and to Him alone. Jesus reinforced this as part of the new covenant. Love would continue to be the basis of this relationship, a wholehearted, soul filled, with every energy expression lifestyle of love.

This right relationship based on love would be characterized by obedience. The book of Deuteronomy records the stipulations of the covenant God made with the people of Israel as they prepared to enter the Promised Land. Moses stood before them and said, “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in His ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it” (Deut 20:15-15). This promise also comes with a curse if the people failed to obey, they would miss out on the life God had planned for them. Eugene H. Merrill comments, “The challenge presented here is precisely the same as that given to the first generation of Israelites at Sinai (Exod 19:5-8) and is typical of the choices offered to those whom the Lord would call to salvation and service (cf.

¹²⁴ Stuart K. Weber, *Matthew*, vol. 1, *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2000), 358.

Josh 24:14-18; 1 Sam 12:19-25; 1 Kgs 18:21,39; Matt 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 18:22).¹²⁵ The choice before mankind is to live in a right relationship with God through love demonstrated by obedience, and discover life and wholeness, or reject God and lose the life He desires to give. Later, the Apostle John wrote of this relationship, “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments” (1 John 5:3). Love, obedience and life are all tied together.

Jesus stated that a right relationship with Him would bring abundant life (John 10:10), a life filled with all that God intends for His people. This is further explored throughout the New Testament and put succinctly by the Apostle John who wrote, “Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:12). God’s ultimate plan has been for mankind to exist in a right relationship with Him through which they will experience the love and life He offers. Our role is to love and obey God: God brings love and life to us. This is what God is working toward throughout history, promised here on earth but brought to full completion in eternity.¹²⁶

The Fall and Separation from God

At the very beginning, a deadly pattern emerges in the relationship with God and humans. God offers this right relationship, but through sin, people reject what God offers, turn their backs on Him and lose the life and love God wants to give.¹²⁷ It began in the Garden with the Fall. Adam and Eve were with God and the tree of life but disobeyed and were forced to leave His presence and be banished from His presence and the tree of life removed (Gen 3). Cain killed his brother and was exiled away from the presence of the Lord (Gen 4:16). The descendants of

¹²⁵ Eugene H. Merrill. *Deuteronomy: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1994), 346.

¹²⁶ Easley, *Revelation*, 395.

¹²⁷ Kenneth O. Gangel and Stephen J. Bramer, *Genesis, Holman Old Testament Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2002), 42, 43.

Adam and Eve turned their backs on God in the time of Noah and were wiped out through the flood (Gen 6-8). In Genesis 11, God saw the pride of the people and their desire for independence from God as they built a tower to make a name for themselves and confused their language and scattered them over the earth.¹²⁸

This turning away from God continued years later after God had established the nation of Israel in Canaan, but the people would cycle through times of closeness with God with times of rebellion in the book of Judges. With the Kingdom of Israel, Solomon drifted away from God, allowing his heart to be given to the gods of his wives and concubines resulting in the splitting of the kingdom (1 Kings 11:11), and the eventual exile of the people of God depicted in the books of History and Prophecy in the Old Testament.

By the time of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ, the message to the people was one of “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 3:2; 4:17), because the people had continued to drift from God, their relationship had shattered, and needed to be renewed. Later after the establishment of churches to carry on the mission of Christ, Paul had to write the church at Corinth to remind them not to turn to idols and to instead remember, “We are the temple of the living God; as God said, ‘I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people’” (2 Cor 6:16).

Mankind tends to wander away from God, to leave their first love, and to pursue lesser things. While it may be called many things, repentance, renewal, revival, revitalization, and other terms, it is the desire of God that mankind return to Him and a right relationship with Him.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 108.

Sherrill G. Stevens comments that, “Man’s relation to His Creator has been the continuing basis of the Hebrew-Christian religion.”¹²⁹

God’s Pursuit of Mankind

God’s call of Abram in Genesis 12 is a major shift in the relationship between God and man. Following the scattering of the people at the tower of Babel in Genesis 11, God now begins a history long pursuit of mankind and a return to a right relationship with Him, beginning with a man named Abram, called to “Enter into covenant with him and to become the originator and ancestor of a nation of people who would live in covenant with God.”¹³⁰ To that time, the people were divided now, with different languages and cultures, and separated across the earth. His call to Abram to leave his people behind, go to a new land where God will make him into a great nation, and then become a blessing to all the families or nations of earth would be the start of a mission of restoring the scattered ones. “God’s covenant with Abram had a new and distinctive dimension. He was seeking a faithful people through whom he could do a redemptive work in the world.”¹³¹ This covenant would be interpreted by the early apostles as a blessing extended through the church to carry the Gospel to the Jews first who had wandered away from God and then to the Gentiles who were separated from God.¹³² The Apostle Paul wrote of this promise to Abram, “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed’” (Gal 3:8). Through the promise to Abram and his descendants, God would offer blessing, restoration and

¹²⁹ Sherrill G. Stevens, *Genesis, Layman’s Bible Book Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1978), 27.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹³² Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26, vol. 1b, New American Commentary*. (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2005), 113.

reconciliation to the peoples of the earth. This is the very heart of God “Who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Tim 2:4).

Because God desires this right relationship with mankind, He actively works to both restore those who have known Him and have yet wandered away and to pursue those who have never known Him. His love drives Him to pursue people who are far away from Him, through reform and revitalization for those who have wandered and mission for those who do not have knowledge of Him.

Abram was the first in a pattern of how God would work.¹³³ God would choose and appoint a human partner, leaders, kings, prophets, and ultimately His Son to work in and through to bring people back to Him as a people group, a nation, a church or as individuals. This is seen throughout the Scriptures.

God spoke through Moses to tell the people during the time of the Exodus, “I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God who has brought out from under the burdens of the Egyptians” (Exod 6:7). This would define the covenant relationship of a God and His people. Later as stated before, God would pass down the law to Moses including the Shema to give parameters to the relationship, a relationship built on love and exclusivity. When the people turned to idols at Sinai, it was Moses whom God used to turn their hearts back to Him (Exod 33, 34). After the death of Moses, it was Joshua who led the people to reaffirm their commitment to God, to serve Him and to incline their heart to Him, as they moved into the Promised Land (Josh 24:15-25).

In the time of the Judges, the people alternated between serving God and forsaking Him, creating a nearly continuous need for reform and revitalization, led by different leaders, some

¹³³ Stevens, *Genesis*, 54.

more successful than others, depending on their hearts. The kings followed after the judges in response to the people's desire for a king so they could be like everyone else, even though God was to be their king (1 Sam 8:5-9).

Following the failure of King Saul to lead the people in a way that was pleasing to God, God had Samuel appoint David to be king, a man after His own heart (1 Sam 13:14). David's kingdom would be established forever as long as his descendants stayed faithful to God, fully in heart and soul, as David explained to his son Solomon (1 Kings 2:1-3). Although considered the wisest man ever to live, Solomon did not follow what his father told him, eventually turning his heart away from God and to the gods of his wives and concubines (1 Kings 1:1-4). This led to the splitting of the kingdom in two, the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Some kings such as Josiah, Jehoshaphat, and Joash led reform in bringing periods of revitalization in spirit of the people, turning their hearts back to Him (1 Kings 18:36), but eventually neither kingdom maintained the relationship God intended for them to have with Him, based on love and obedience, and both nations were sent into exile, separated from God.

During the exile period, God sent his prophets to call the people back into a right relationship with Him. He promised them that once again, "I will bring them to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God in faithfulness and in righteousness" (Zech 8:8). This promise is repeated in Jeremiah 31:33 and 32:38.

Perhaps Ezekiel paints the clearest picture of what revitalization looks like in the Old Testament. God spoke through Ezekiel to remind the people that while God had treated Israel as His chosen bride, the people had instead chosen to prostitute themselves to other gods and leave the life and love God had intended for their relationship (Ezek 16). God promised to restore them to Himself, return them to the land, and to do the work needed to make this happen, by first

cleansing them with water, and then transforming them from the inside out. He told them, “And I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and I will cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules” (Ezek 36:26, 27). This Spirit would be Yahweh’s Spirit and would empower them to live in full devotion to Him in obedience.¹³⁴ This is a forerunner to revitalization efforts in the future, dependent on the Spirit to bring a change in heart, to bring life and to make obedience possible. Because of mankind’s constant failure in living in the right relationship God intended, God now shows that restoration and revitalization are dependent on God to bring to the lives of His people. It is His work, accomplished by His Spirit in cooperation with the people. The power comes from God alone.

In Ezekiel 37, God continues to give Ezekiel a picture of revitalization and new life through the vision of a valley of dry bones. Here, God said to the bones, “Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live” (Ezek 37:5). Then before his eyes, Ezekiel watched the bones take on sinew, flesh, and skin, but not life. God then commanded Ezekiel to prophesy over the bones that breath would enter into the lifeless bodies, and they would be restored into an army. The breath or Spirit came from the four winds, entered into their bodies, and the bodies came to life, in a parallel to God breathing life into the first human, made of dust. God demonstrated His power in bringing life into what was devoid of life. Lamar Cooper writes of this episode, “There was then present for Ezekiel to believe that the power of God could bring new life to a hopeless situation such as a nation gone into exile. Only Yahweh could replace the hopelessness of the death of a nation with a new life and a new nation.”¹³⁵ In seeking to bring life

¹³⁴ Lamar Eugene Cooper, Sr. *Ezekiel vol. 17, New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 275.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 278.

to any situation, be it a nation, a church, or even to an individual, it is incumbent on the leaders to understand that this can occur only through the power of God through the Holy Spirit. It is God alone that can be new life and a new heart that produces love and obedience. Eventually, the exiles do return home to occupy the land, though remnants are scattered throughout the region, as God prepared for the next step in His epic story of establishing a right relationship with His created beings, a next step that would be the greatest of them all.

Life in Christ

From the very beginning, God has had a plan to restore mankind in a right relationship with Him through Christ, and this relationship would be as part of His family, His adopted children (Eph 1:3-14). In Christ is the very life needed and promised (John 1:4). Jesus came to save us from our sins, which have separated mankind from the Father, and through the sacrifice of Christ, driven by love of the Father, be made right again with God through faith in Him (Rom 5:1; 8; 11).

Jesus stated His mission in the world as one who came to “Seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10), the Jews first and then later the Gentiles. As the Father worked through people in partnership in the Old Testament to bring about reconciliation and restoration, Jesus would continue this practice by training His followers to become “fishers of men” (Matt 4:19). Jesus exemplified this for His disciples both with Jews like Nicodemus and Gentiles such as the Samaritan woman (John 3-4), then He sent them out to practice what they had learned, (Matthew 10) and then commissioned them to carry on the mission when His work on earth was done. (John 20:21-23; Luke 24:46-48; Mark 16:15-16; Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8) This mission has been passed on to the ensuing generations (2 Cor 5:18-20), down through to history to the church of

today. God entrusts His mission to His people and chooses to partner with Him, and yet it is not the people who bring spiritual life and growth, but God, Himself (1 Cor 3:4-9). It is through this partnership that human beings can experience the presence of God as Jesus promised to be with them as they go on the mission to make disciples (Matt 18:19-20).

This mission is accomplished through the Holy Spirit who gives the power to make it possible (Acts 1:8). It is the Spirit who brings life (John 6:63). Without the Spirit of God, there is no life and no restoration of life that has been lost. The Holy Spirit comes to live within His people, making possible the very right relationship that God desires, to dwell with mankind (John 14:16-17). As the Holy Spirit interacts in the lives of the followers of Jesus, He will guide them in truth and direction (John 16:13), and as they follow His lead, the relationship and partnership in the mission gives them passion, purpose, identity, and life (Rom 8:11, 16, 17). The Spirit intercedes for those who follow Christ and helps them in their weaknesses (Rom 8:26, 27). The church that is filled with followers of Christ, who are in turn filled with the Spirit, has the power and direction to accomplish the mission given to them to “Bring salvation to the ends of the earth” (Acts 13:47).

The mission in its simplest terms is to take the Gospel message of Jesus Christ to the whole world (Mark 16:15), make additional disciples or students of Jesus Christ of all who receive the Gospel, students who are taught to obey all that Jesus has taught them, including the Greatest Commandment to love God and to love others, bringing them into a right relationship with God as well (Matt 28:18-20) as Jesus builds His church (Matt 16:18). This mission is worth giving one’s life to fully and completely as Christ works in them (Col 1:28,29) and is a calling to be fulfilled and lived out in a worthy manner (Eph 4:1). The church that lives out this calling will rely on the power of God to accomplish the mission even in the midst of suffering or hardship (2

Tim 1:8). The mission is life-giving, and Christ promises to always be with those who are on mission for Him (Matt 28:20), fulfilling His desire to be fully present with His people.

When the church loses the mission of God and a heart for God, she loses the very life that God intends her to have. Churches that live only for themselves do not last. The Apostle John was given a vision by God of seven churches as recorded in the book of Revelation 2. One of the churches, the church at Ephesus, started off well but had lost her way. John was instructed to write to the church, “But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent” (Rev 2:4, 5). This church is a good representation of churches in need of revitalization. They started off well, fulfilling their purpose in a right relationship with God, but along the way, they lost their first love. They are told to remember their past and return to it through repentance and then continue the work they had been doing in the beginning. If they failed in doing so, the lampstand which represents their life would be removed. In effect, the church would die. Even in this dire circumstance, they were still offered a chance at new life if they were willing to return to God as they had in the beginning. There is hope for any church in need of new life. God continues to welcome those who are willing to return. The Apostle James writes, “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you” (Jas 4:8). The door is always open for a return to God. In fact, another church referenced in Revelation, the church at Laodicea, had also lost her way, being neither hot nor cold. Jesus instructed the church and said, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me” (Rev 3:20). Jesus finds Himself outside the church but wanting and willing to return if the church will only open the door. The relationship, represented by sharing a meal together, would be fully

restored if only the church would be willing to let Christ enter. This is a wonderful picture of what God desires, to sit and have a meal together as a family, He our God, and we His people. Revitalization is often simply about a church desiring this close relationship with Christ through which restoration and renovation of the heart of the church can occur.

Summary

The heart of God is to have a right relationship with His people, to be their God and for them to be His people. The trouble throughout the history of mankind has been that people tend to forget Him abandon Him, pursue other lesser things and in general turn their backs on God. Yet, God has remained faithful, and His love has never relinquished. This is the backdrop for any church revitalization efforts. Inevitably, churches drift, lose their first love, begin to die, but if they choose to desire God again, He graciously draws them to Him again, giving life and vitality through right relationships with the individuals who make up the church. Revitalization is in many ways simply a return to a first love, a love that should define the lives of all who claim to follow Christ.

Theoretical Foundations

Tom Cheyney suggests there are 38 church revitalization models.¹³⁶ Thom Rainer writes of three models, acquisitional revitalization where a healthier church acquires a dying church, covenantal revitalization where an outside, objective person is brought in to lead the revitalization efforts in covenant with the church leadership, and organic revitalization, where the revitalization process is led by the existing church.¹³⁷ Ed Stetzer concludes there are four models

¹³⁶ Tom Cheyney, *38 Church Revitalization Models for the Twenty-First Century*, (Orlando, FL: Renovate Publishing Group, 2014).

¹³⁷ “3 Types of Church Revitalization,” Church Answers, accessed November 21, 2020, <https://churchanswers.com/blog/three-types-of-church-revitalization-introducing-church-answers-monthly/>

of church revitalization or renewal. The first, missio–renewal, is the rediscovery of the mission of God and centering the church around it. The second, leadership renewal is the introduction of new leaders in the church or the renewal of the existing leaders. The third, spiritual formation renewal is the movement toward greater discipleship efforts and results or fruit. The fourth, evangelistic renewal is the movement toward greater outreach, reaching non-believers and seeing them become followers of Jesus, thus adding new life to the church.¹³⁸ Each of these models have merit while also having some overlap with each other. For this study, these models will be synthesized into the following: Recovery/Restoration, Renovation/Remodel, and Repurposing.

Recovery/Restoration Model

The Recovery/Restoration model refers to a church moving back in some way to what she had experienced in her beginning. It is analogous to an older house or building that is restored to its original form after years of change or neglect. This is reflected in the church in Ephesus referenced in Revelation 2:1-7, that had lost her first love for Christ and was directed to return to what she had been doing before when she was a healthy and vibrant church. Churches that start off healthy and full of life, but along the way lost her love for Christ, His Word, and His ways would follow this model. Harry L. Reeder argues for this approach in seeking church revitalization, which he likens to a recovery from sickness to good health. He writes that he is against other modern models that pull from secular concepts because, “Jesus doesn’t say we should *reengineer* the church; He says that we should *reestablish* it. He calls for a return to the ‘first things’ that made the ministry great before, not a whole new approach to ‘doing church.’”¹³⁹ For some churches, it is simply a matter of returning to her earlier, healthier roots

¹³⁸ “Church Revitalization – Part 1,” The Exchange, Christianity Today, accessed November 21, 2020, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2020/february/church-revitalization-part-one.html>

¹³⁹ Reeder, *From Embers to a Flame*, 45.

and building on what she was doing in the past. This model must address how to update methods in a quickly changing world and not confuse methods with principles. It is an issue of restoring the heart of the church but not necessarily the models of ministry used at an earlier time in a different culture. Jesus taught that new wine needed new wineskins (Matt 9:14-17), and it would be wise for those who choose this model beware of simply desiring to return to the “ways things used to be.” Recovery and Restoration is at its core a restoration of the heart of a church which can then lead to the other models of revitalization.

Renovation/Remodel Model

Most church revitalization efforts fall into the Renovation/Remodel category, focusing on updating, retooling, modifying or refocusing existing programs, activities, worship services, or other features of the church to bring new life into the church. This is analogous to remodeling a house by painting the walls or even removing some, adding new fixtures or appliances, changing the landscaping, making repairs, and in general giving the house a new look. It can include an addition, creating more space with additional function or for additional people. Sometimes, it requires a complete remodel, and starting over almost from scratch.

Ranier’s acquisition model would fall into this category, for those churches who need to “die” so another church may live in her place, a church with a new name, new leadership, new methods and new everything. It is like selling a house to a new owner who comes in with a whole new vision. Ranier’s covenant model incorporates the idea of bringing in an outside source to lead and guide the revitalization process much like an architect, designer and general contractor are brought in to guide the remodeling process for a church.

All but one of Stetzer's models reflect the Renovation/Remodel. Leadership renewal is focused on bringing change to the leaders, either with new ones or a change in the existing ones, catalyzed by learning, growing, a changing of the hearts, or a new vision. Spiritual formation is about the renovation of the hearts of the people, helping them to go deeper into their relationship with Christ. His model of evangelistic renewal is like adding a new wing on the house, or a new entryway, anything that might make it more effective for making space for new people.

In *Re:Vision: the Key to Transforming Your Church*, Malphurs and Penhold write that, "The major reason so many churches are plateaued or in decline is that they've either lost their vision or adopted the wrong vision."¹⁴⁰ Their solution is visionary leadership. The vision of the leaders is in need of renovation. The leaders must be able "to see" what the church should be and become and how to lead the church in that direction. The vision of the leader is the blueprint for revitalization and new life.

Robert D. Stuart focuses on the leadership aspect of revitalization in a broader sense than simply vision. He writes that, "The spiritual health of the local church is directly related to the spiritual health of the church. When the health of leaders improves, so too does the health of the church... Good leaders, however, confront the facts, analyze the situation, and take action to revitalize their churches."¹⁴¹ For some church renovations, it is all about leadership. Renovate the leader; renovate the church.

One method of church renovation is centered on relying on the Word of God and the Spirit of God to bring real and lasting change. God works through His people to bring this change. Brian Croft writes that, "This approach incorporates both the deep conviction that God's power by His Spirit and the word does the work and the fact that God also uses the creativity,

¹⁴⁰ Malphurs and Penhold, *Re:Vision*, 14.

¹⁴¹ Stuart, *Church Revitalization from the Inside Out*, 15.

passion, unique gifts, and the zeal of the His leaders and people to breathe life and build His church.”¹⁴² This type of renovation involves a partnership between God and the church to bring about the revitalization in the areas that need it most. God provides, guides, and empowers the process. The church submits, obeys, and follows the promptings of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴³

Renovation is often seen as a catalyst for growth, be it through new believers or through attracting those who believe but who are without a church. In this model, the objective of the renovation is to do what is necessary and effective in bringing in more people.¹⁴⁴ The leaders of churches in this model recognize that God desires growth for the church and for the church to be fruitful and multiply.¹⁴⁵ The church views everything that is a part of the church through the lens of reaching and retaining people. Programs, methods, facilities, worship styles and other aspects are all observed, evaluated, and if needed changed in light of the mission. The church may look to other churches for new ideas, or to the secular world for methods of connecting with the culture in hopes of reaching people. Renovation may lead to the changing of the name of the church or moving it or taking it in a new direction.¹⁴⁶ This is usually the idea behind a church acquisition or restart. Everything about the church is put under scrutiny and if needed, the church is allowed to die and then is reborn with everything made new, including new leaders, new people, new methods, new styles in worship music or preaching, and typically a new facility or a newly renovated one. The mission drives the transformation for generations to come.¹⁴⁷

Changes in culture, from one generation to another, can drive church revitalization. What worked last year may not work this year. What was new and exciting a decade ago, or less, may

¹⁴² Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 17.

¹⁴³ Davis, *Revitalize*, 73.

¹⁴⁴ Lee Kricher, *For a New Generation: A Practical Guide for Revitalizing Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 45.

¹⁴⁵ McIntosh, *There's Hope for Your Church*, chapter 1.

¹⁴⁶ Kricher, *For a New Generation*: chapters 1-5.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 155.

appear old, worn and out of touch to a new generation. As change accelerates, church revitalization may need to do the same in order to keep up. This could lead to what Lee Kricher calls “Perpetual church revitalization - putting appropriate strategies in place to ensure that a church will connect with and stay connected with the next generation.”¹⁴⁸ This would lead to renovation being a constant process, with an eye always open toward change and leading change. Churches, like any living thing go through a life cycle, something that Aubrey Murphy calls an S-curve. He writes that, “The S-curve depicts how virtually everything in life begins, grows, plateaus, and then ultimately dies.”¹⁴⁹ Churches follow this same pattern, but they can break the pattern if they are willing to start change while the church is growing and before it begins to decline.¹⁵⁰ Renovation and innovation then become part of the culture of the church, introducing change before the need arises. While the principles may remain the same, the methods are constantly changing. Andrew Davis puts it this way, “A church that stops reforming is dying.”¹⁵¹ The work of renovation and remodeling is never done then. Everything is seen as a season. The mission of the church does not change. She is still called to make disciples, but how that is accomplished, and the methods used to accomplish it may need to be in constant evaluation if the church desires to continue to be effective in fulfilling her mission. Constant renovation is needed for the church to stay relevant and vibrant.

Repurposing Model

The third model of church renovation beyond Recovery/Restoration and Renovation/Remodel is Repurposing. While this model has much in common with the other two,

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 20.

¹⁴⁹ Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A 21st-Century Model for Church and Ministry Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 148.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 196.

¹⁵¹ Davis, *Revitalize*, 22.

it does present a different understanding of revitalization. Much like a movie theater that is repurposed into a church facility or a house that becomes a museum or an office, the church itself may experience a repurposing. The Missional Movement is an example of this. In the Missional Movement, churches are structured solely around mission, built around *oikos*, households who function together with a purpose. They may or may not still follow similar practices as other churches, but the purpose of their practices takes on new meaning and different settings. The purpose is to live on mission.¹⁵² The disciple-making church is another example of this model. Everything is seen in the light of whether or not the church is making disciples who follow Jesus Christ. Instead of focusing on building an organization or an institution, the disciple-making church focuses on building people. This should be the goal of churches seeking to fulfill the Great Commission in a church centric model.¹⁵³ Rather than handing off the mission of making disciples to parachurch organizations, in the disciple making church, the church takes on the responsibility of making disciples from non-believers to disciples who make disciples. The giftedness of the people is directed toward discipling. The church culture is directed toward discipling, creating a loving community to nurture the spiritual growth of the people toward Christ-centeredness.¹⁵⁴ The church is repurposed around that mission and evaluates each program, activity, meeting, and thought around this mission. Bill Hull writes of the disciple making church, “The discipling church is a community of disciples and their leaders seeking to know God and do His will.”¹⁵⁵ As a community of disciples, each person is on a personal journey of obedience with Christ through the Holy Spirit, and each person is at a different and

¹⁵² Mike Breen, *Leading Missional Communities: Rediscovering the Power of Living on Mission Together* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), chapter 1.

¹⁵³ Bill Hull, *The Disciple Making Church: Leading a Body of Believers on the Journey of Faith* (Colorado Springs, CO: Baker Books, 2010), Introduction.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, chapter 2.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

unique place of maturity and closeness to Christ. Revitalization is accomplished in the individual lives of the people, one person at a time.

Summary

As depicted in the book *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth* by Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, in 2004 Willow Creek Community Church began taking the first steps in assessing the spiritual growth and maturity of her congregants. After many years being one of the most influential churches in the world and the model many “seeker-driven” churches had been emulating for decades, the leadership of the church wanted to see just how effective they were in helping people become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ, growing in their faith and love for Jesus Christ and for others. After an initial survey of the church, they did not discover what they hoped they would find.¹⁵⁶ They were sure that getting people involved in church activities, the very activities that other churches around the world were using as a template for revitalization in their own churches, was leading people to a greater love for God and for others. That was not the case. In fact, they discovered that, “(1) Increased participation in church activities by themselves barely moved our people to love God and others more; (2) We had a lot of dissatisfied people; (3) We had a lot of people so dissatisfied that they were ready to leave.”¹⁵⁷ Willow Creek was forced to re-evaluate everything they were doing in light of these results.

In effect this meant that the thousands of churches which had followed the Willow Creek model had to re-evaluate what they were doing as well. Revitalization efforts based on simply “renovating” the music and preaching styles, facility architecture, fixtures, ministries and other

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., Forward.

¹⁵⁷ Hawkins and Parkinson, *Move*, 17.

aspects of “church life’ would not truly fulfill the mission of the church to make disciples. They might draw a crowd, but alone they were not enough the change the hearts of the people.

While not a Willow Creek style church, Bridges Church was a church that needed to take a close look at everything she was doing and ask herself, “Are we truly making disciples who love God and love others?” and if not, “How can we change?” This led the church leaders to follow a hybrid model of revitalization, using key principles in all three models, Recovery/Restoration, Renovation/Remodel, and Repurposing. To become what the REVEAL Study for Churches identifies as a Vibrant Church, Bridges would need to see their hearts restored to Christ, a recovery of her first love and first mission, to reach the community for Christ. (Rev 2:4, 5; Matt 28:18-20) She would need to go through a renovation and remodel process of key elements of the church, refocusing message series, small groups, ministries, and events to help the church bring about a missional resurgence, helping people go from Exploring Christ to Christ-centered, the full process from conversion to maturity, outreach to sending. Finally, she would need to repurpose what she was doing, with an emphasis on making disciples, one individual at a time, helping them to grow by being devoted to, developing in, and deployed by Jesus.

Based on the REVEAL for Churches research, Bridges Church has the ongoing goal of continuing the process of being a Vibrant Church, helping her members become fully Christ-centered, surrendered to Christ in every aspect of their life, strong in their core beliefs, in regular spiritual practices, and putting their faith into action, willing to risk everything for Christ.¹⁵⁸ Revitalization will be a continuous process, and the church always need to be willing to innovate

¹⁵⁸ Parkinson and Scammacca-Lewis, *Rise*, 136.

and change as necessary to reach people and develop them as the culture and needs of the people change. The work continues.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Chapter Three will describe the methodology for the study. The overall structure of the research involved conducting an initial survey to determine the spiritual vitality of the congregation using the REVEAL for Churches Survey, identifying and implementing prescribed interventions over the course of one year, and then resurveying the congregation at the end of the one-year period to discover what if any spiritual growth occurred in the lives of the congregation.

REVEAL for Churches

In 2004, Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois began a deep look at themselves to determine how well they were doing as a church in developing fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. They determined that “the purpose of our churches – our commission, as church leaders – is to help people in our congregations to become disciples who obey Jesus by loving God and loving others.”¹⁵⁹ They then asked themselves, “How do we know if those we lead are truly growing more in love with God and extending that love to other people?”¹⁶⁰ This question led them to also ask, “How are we *really* doing? How much impact is our church making on people’s lives? Are they closer to Christ? Do they exhibit more love and compassion? Are they more Jesus in word and deed?”¹⁶¹ The REVEAL for Churches Study was born out of the desire to be able to answer these questions. Two members of the church staff,

¹⁵⁹ Hawkins and Parkinson, *MOVE*, 12.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

Cally Parkinson and Greg Hawkins wanted to know if it was possible to measure spiritual growth and thereby determine a church's effectiveness in fulfilling her purpose.

Over the next year, they surveyed the Willow Creek congregation and made the following conclusions: “(1) Increased participation in church activities by themselves barely moved our people to love God and others more; (2) We had a lot of dissatisfied people; (3) We have a lot of people so dissatisfied that they were ready to leave.”¹⁶² These findings led the leadership of the church to make significant changes in the methods and strategies they were employing to help people grow spiritually. These findings also caught the attention of leaders of other churches and led them to ask themselves the same questions about their own effectiveness in fulfilling their purpose to make disciples. These churches inquired about using the same survey models, and the REVEAL for Churches survey was created to meet this need. As of 2020, over two-thousand three-hundred churches representing over six-hundred fifty thousand congregants have participated in this survey.

Over the ensuing years, the REVEAL for Churches team has further refined and developed the survey to produce comprehensive and practical findings to help the participating church to not only know the spiritual condition of the church as a whole but to also determine effective interventions that can lead to greater spiritual vitality. These findings include the following key discoveries in understanding and addressing spiritual vitality in a church: The Spiritual Continuum, Spiritual Growth Catalysts, the Spiritual Vitality Index, the Five Best Practices, and Church Archetypes.

The Spiritual Continuum helps to give a spiritual snapshot of an individual at a given time, and “in essence, the Continuum defines four stages of spiritual growth based on how a

¹⁶² Ibid., 17.

person describes his or her personal relationship with Christ.”¹⁶³ These four stages include Exploring Christ, Growing in Christ, Close to Christ, and Christ-Centered. According to their research, that “these four stages are powerful, consistent predictors of all factors related to spiritual growth measured by REVEAL. In other words, as a person’s relationship with Christ matures through these four stages, everything rises.”¹⁶⁴

Spiritual Growth Catalysts are another significant finding of the survey and have been identified as key factors that help people move from one stage to the next. The most significant catalysts to help people move from Exploring Christ to Growing in Christ include the core beliefs of salvation by grace, the Trinity, a personal God, and the authority of the Bible. The catalysts that help people move from Growing in Christ to Close to Christ include core personal spiritual practices including reflection on Scripture, prayer for guidance, and solitude. The catalysts that help people move from Close to Christ to Christ-Centered include a willingness to risk everything for Christ, evangelism, and serving those in need.¹⁶⁵

The Spiritual Vitality Index is a “gauge that measures the spiritual maturity of a congregation and the discipleship effectiveness of its church.”¹⁶⁶ The research staff of REVEAL created this score based on a typical academic grading scale, with a score of seventy considered to be average. The Spiritual Vitality Index reflects the findings from three main categories in the survey, the personal spiritual practices of the congregation as a whole, the church’s role in fostering spiritual growth, and the degree in which the church is putting their faith into action. The Spiritual Vitality Index is the score that encapsulates the survey results from all the participants in a given church in comparison to all the other churches that have already taken the

¹⁶³ Parkinson and Scammacca-Lewis, *Rise*, 3.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 3, 4.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

survey in the past. This score then becomes the best indicator for the spiritual vitality of any given church at a given point in time.

The Five Best Practices were discovered through the development of the survey process. By reexamining over thirty churches who had scored in the top percentile, the research staff of REVEAL were able to identify key activities, methods, and cultures that these churches held in common. The Five Best practices include the following:

1. **Get People Moving:** Jump-start newcomers with clear next steps by offering a spiritual “on-ramp” (like Alpha). Make the discipleship path and destination clear.
2. **Embed the Bible in Everything:** Make Scripture the heart of the church culture. Take away people’s excuses by doing whatever you can to make Bible engagement easy.
3. **Create Ownership:** Help people “own” the vision of the church. Use your small group system to empower and equip them to grow as leaders.
4. **Pastor the Local Community:** Make the local community your mission field by partnering with other churches and nonprofits to tackle local problems.
5. **Christ-Centered Leadership:** Surrender all leadership dilemmas and decisions to Christ. Humility and transparency are key.¹⁶⁷

The Five Best Practices are effective in any and every church in moving toward a more vibrant church and can be incorporated into the church culture through very specific actions, regardless of church size, location, background, denomination, or demographic. They are independent of any other indicator.

Based on the patterns of scoring in the Spiritual Vitality Index and other key findings produced by participating churches over time, the REVEAL researchers concluded that there are

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 7.

eight general archetypes of churches that range from unhealthy and lacking vitality to vibrant and growing churches. These archetypes include the following:

1. The Troubled Church (14%) – People are spiritually immature and unhappy with the church and its senior pastor.
2. The Complacent Church (17%) – Faith is surprisingly underdeveloped, given that attenders are longtime churchgoers.
3. The Extroverted Church (9%) – Faith is underdeveloped, but community service is embraced.
4. The Average Church (13%) – No spiritual measures deviate from the norm.
5. The Introverted Church (17%) – Faith is strong, but faith-based behaviors are lacking.
6. The Self-Motivated Church (10%) – Faith is strong across the board, yet, people are unenthused about the church.
7. The Energized Church (12%) – Faith is somewhat underdeveloped but growing, and people love the church.
8. The Vibrant Church (8%) – Faith is strong and mature, but still growing, and people love the church.¹⁶⁸

A church is classified into one of these eight archetypes based on the overall results of their survey and are encouraged to take steps forward toward greater vibrancy with the goal of becoming a Vibrant Church over time. The REVEAL for Churches staff conducts a thorough review of the results with the leadership of the church and recommends specific interventions to help that church take steps to address weaknesses and move toward greater vitality. These recommended interventions are based on actions taken by other participating churches who

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 3.

shared similar results. In this way, REVEAL for Churches is both descriptive and prescriptive in nature and very beneficial in helping churches grow using proven actions.

The Initial REVEAL for Churches Survey

In the elder meeting February 19, 2019, the elders of Bridges Church made the executive decision to move forward with the REVEAL for Churches study in an effort to determine the initial spiritual vitality of the church and to participate in this Doctor of Ministry Research Project. On February 21, 2019, this project received IRB exemption from further review, allowing the project to begin. (See Appendix A) The dates April 28 through May 12 were chosen to administer the survey, a two-week period that REVEAL for Churches has determined to be most effective in getting a good number of responses.

The procedure for identifying the respondents was determined with input between the REVEAL for Churches team and the staff of Bridges Church. Respondents needed to be eighteen years and older, be a regular attender at the church which the church identifies through the database as someone who has attended a minimum of four services. The Bridges Church staff, consisting of the Lead Pastor and Administrative Assistant worked through the database, reviewed the list of regular attenders, added new people where appropriate, and identified those who no longer attended and moved them to inactive status, giving the church a more accurate database with which to work.

REVEAL for Churches requires a minimum of fifty respondents for the survey to be truly representative of the congregation and typically sets a goal of receiving a total number of responses equal to thirty-five percent of average adult weekly worship service attendance. Because Bridges Church was averaging ninety-seven adults in weekly worship service

attendance, this minimum goal was changed to fifty percent by the REVEAL for Churches team. The church announced a goal of having seventy-five respondents.

In preparation for the survey, an initial email was sent to those identified in the data base, as being over eighteen years old or older and a regular attendee of the church, announcing the upcoming project with an attached consent form that did not need to be signed. (See Appendix B and Appendix C) The Lead Pastor announced the upcoming survey in each of the Sunday services for the two weeks prior to the launch of the survey churchwide with an accompanying one-half page flyer inserted in the worship guide describing the survey with the dates of administration. The lead article in the church's weekly electronic newsletter prior to the survey was dedicated to the REVEAL study and encouraged people to participate. In the two weeks leading up to the survey, the Bridges Leadership Team consisting of elders, Small Group Leaders, and Ministry Team Leaders were encouraged to take the survey in advance. They each received an email with a link to the survey, instructions on completing the survey, and the consent form. On April 28, the survey period began, and an email with the survey link, instructions for taking the survey, and the attached consent form was sent out to those who fit the criteria.

Respondents were able to take the survey through the provided link at a time of their choosing during the two-week period. The survey consisted of one hundred questions and was expected to take most people approximately twenty minutes to complete. For those who needed help with taking the survey, a laptop was set up in the lobby area of the elementary school where the church held worship services on Sunday mornings. A volunteer was made available to help anyone who needed help. In the end, no one took the survey on the provided computer.

Over the two-week period the survey was open, reminder emails were sent out every three to four days to encourage participation. The church also utilized the new church application to remind people to complete the survey. The church application makes it possible to send out notifications to those who have it installed on their smart phones, and notifications were sent out through the two-week period. Ultimately, there were sixty-eight respondents, surpassing the goal set by REVEAL but falling short of the church's goal. The survey was anonymous with no personal information from the respondents provided in any of the reports.

The Initial REVEAL for Churches Survey Results

Because the results from the first survey would help form the intervening interventions, it is important to review them here. The results from the second survey conducted in the Spring of 2020 will be reported in Chapter 4 of this work.

In practice, two days after the survey window is closed, a report is generated and sent out to the participating church. (See Appendix D). REVEAL for Churches sends each participating church a comprehensive report which includes all the results and an executive report which contains the key summaries, summaries that would be used to give the church direction in moving toward greater vibrancy. The results for Bridges Church were initially very encouraging but with key areas in need of improvement.

The initial, most important results were to be found in the Spiritual Vibrancy Index (SVI) and in the Church Archetype assignment. Bridges Church scored a seventy-five on the SVI, meaning the church was above average, average being a score of seventy. The SVI is derived from scores from the categories of Personal Spiritual Practices, Faith in Action, and the Church's Role in developing and promoting spiritual growth. Of these three categories, the church was

above average in Personal Spiritual Practices and Faith in Action but only average in the Church's Role.

By combining all the data from the survey and then comparing the results Bridges Church to other participating churches and the results from their surveys, Bridges was classified as a Vibrant Church with a Self-Motivated Shadow Archetype, being the next closest archetype. Vibrant Churches only make up eight percent of all churches taking the survey. A key understanding of a Vibrant Church is that “the Vibrant Church does a better job than any other archetype of opening the doors – of breaking through to people’s hearts, minds and souls – so that the life the Spirit wants to give is unmistakable and embraced.”¹⁶⁹ There are six factors that vibrant churches demonstrate at a higher level than other churches. These six factors include fully surrendered disciples, extremely satisfied church members, large and growing congregations, members who are equipped and on the move, focused leaders and diverse Southern demographics.¹⁷⁰ Bridges Church is certainly not a perfect church, but is only doing a better job than most other churches in helping people on their spiritual journeys toward Christ-Centeredness.

The survey also revealed the breakdown for the percent in each of the segments on the Spiritual Continuum for the people of Bridges. Four percent were in the Exploring Christ segment, which is below average, thirty-two percent were in the Growing in Christ segment, which is below average, thirty-eight percent were in the Close to Christ segment, which is well above average, and twenty-five percent were in the Christ-Centered segment, which is average. The percentage of people in the Close to Christ category stands out and was one of the factors leading to an overall positive score for the church.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 134.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 136-139.

Another area that was important in the overall assessment for Bridges was found in the scores for Best Practices, the five most important indicators for church health and vibrancy. In the practices of Get People Moving, Create Ownership, Pastor the Community, and Christ-Centered Leadership the church was well above average. In Embed the Bible, Bridges was average which would become an area of concern, and a big part of the resulting interventions.

In general, REVEAL for Churches prescribes specific interventions for each of the eight Church Archetypes. These interventions are Spiritual Capital Assessment, Unconventional Servant Leadership Vision, and Spiritual Mentoring, and each was derived from studying the practices of churches which scored very high on the SVI in the past.

Spiritual Capital Assessment refers to the process churches should go through to ascertain to what extent the congregation will follow and participate in major new initiatives implemented by the church leadership. Spiritual Capital Assessment is a process that “depends on two factors. First, a church needs to assess its ‘platform of permission,’. . . . This relates to the goodwill extended to the church by its congregants. If they love the church, respect the senior pastor, and are highly supportive of the church vision, then they will cooperate and contribute to whatever initiative church leaders introduce. Spiritual Capital also depends on the faith-based maturity of the congregation.”¹⁷¹ Trust is directly related to Spiritual Capital, a trust in the leadership by the congregation, a trust in the congregation by the leadership, and a trust in God by all involved. Spiritual Capital is difficult to build, but easy to lose, and must be used wisely.

Unconventional Servant Leadership Vision refers to mobilizing the church to serve the community around them, developing the heart of a servant, ready to meet the needs of others beyond themselves. It is about building “the heartbeat of the church by providing constant

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 174.

opportunities for congregants to serve Jesus by meeting the needs of ‘the least of these.’”¹⁷²

Getting out into the community to serve builds on evangelism in that “the most mature Christ followers use these initiatives as opportune occasions to share their faith.”¹⁷³ Being able to share one’s story of what God is doing in their life is essential in living life on mission.

Unconventional Servant Leadership Vision directly confronts the consumer mentality that can so easily cripple a church and her missional purpose and seeks to develop a life full of the love of God for the world.

Spiritual Mentoring is the process of one person pouring themselves into others, helping them grow to greater spiritual maturity and a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. It is about a spiritually mature person coming alongside an individual or a small group and demonstrating through action and word what following Jesus looks like in everyday life, actions and decisions. In many churches, Spiritual Mentoring is “more of an organic process than a ministry.”¹⁷⁴ It is typically modeled by the core leadership of the church and then gradually becomes part of a culture of disciples who make disciples.

These three interventions, Spiritual Capital Assessment, Unconventional Servant Leadership Vision, and Spiritual Mentoring, along with the full REVEAL for Churches report for Bridges Church, including survey results and recommendations for other specific interventions would be key components of the consultation with a member of the REVEAL for Churches. This meeting was scheduled soon after the results were released.

¹⁷² Ibid., 171.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 171.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 167.

The Initial REVEAL for Churches Consultation

On May 28, 2019, the Elders of Bridges Church met with Cally Parkinson, Communications Director for REVEAL for Churches and co-author of *Rise: Bold Strategies to Transform Your Church*, *Move: What 1,000 Churches reveal About Spiritual Growth*, and *Reveal: Where are You?*, in a consultation to review the church's results from the REVEAL for Churches survey and to review suggested interventions. The first part of the meeting was centered around a review of the survey results, and then the conversation turned more toward possible next steps for the church in response to those results. The following topics were the main foci of the consultation:

1. Bridges is doing well as a vibrant church but can still grow and improve.
2. In order to improve the SVI, emphasis should be placed on putting Faith into Action. Bridges is strong in serving the community but not as strong in “having spiritual conversations with non-believers” nor in “giving away my life”.
3. There is an opportunity in “living out your faith” and utilizing evangelistic campaigns with slogans such as “Pray for Your 3” or “Seven in Heaven in 2011” which were ideas used by other churches in the past. These types of simple phrases, if repeated and emphasized, were discovered to be some of the best tools for mobilizing a church to be on mission. Prayer and accountability should be emphasized for greater evangelistic efforts. The congregation should be trained to be better able to tell their faith stories.
4. Parkinson suggested that Bridges Church look more fully into a “Living It Out Campaign” where the congregation is given an opportunity to live out their faith in practical ways. Living It Out Campaigns include events like preempting worship services to go out into the community and serve instead, providing congregants with funds to give

to others in need as they are led by the Holy Spirit, or to challenge the congregants to invest the funds in some way and bring back the proceeds to go toward a specific project to the benefit of someone or something beyond the needs of the church.

5. As a vibrant church, Bridges should pursue spiritual mentoring in a more in-depth way, providing accountability and individual attention by those who are more spiritually mature to others who are seeking help on their spiritual journey.
6. One of the areas that Bridges Church did not score as high on in comparison to other categories was to embed the Bible in everything, one of the Five Best Practices. The consultant suggested that the church was saying, “Help me understand the Bible.” This would be a point of emphasis for the interventions.
7. The church should assess their spiritual capital and consider making a bold move to better reach the community. Because the church scored high in church and pastor satisfaction and because the church demonstrated a high SVI score, the leaders should explore how God wanted the church to move forward into a possible new initiative. At the time, Bridges was looking into purchasing her first facility, and this was discussed as a great possible way of utilizing the spiritual capital that had been building over the years.

Following this consultation, the Elders of Bridges Church met together on June 17, 2019, and began to develop a plan to address the findings from the survey and the recommendations of the consultant. It was decided to move forward with the purchase of an existing church facility to become the future home of the church with a fall, 2019 expected purchase followed by renovations. This action was not considered part of the interventions, but it was acknowledged that this major decision by the church should be a large part of the move to greater missional purpose, focusing on how the facility would be an effective tool in

reaching the community and not an end goal in itself. The interventions would be planned in conjunction with the opening of the new facility in an act of synergy and momentum building in a missional resurgence.

The Intervention Design

The Elders of Bridges Church, which includes the Lead Pastor, formulated a basic overarching direction for moving toward greater missional effectiveness as a church. The interventions would address the following major considerations:

1. Mobilize the church to be on mission. This mobilization would include several message series designed to raise awareness of the need to share the Gospel, inspire the church to pray for the salvation of others by name, and equip the congregants to share the basic Gospel message and their personal faith stories with others within their spheres of influence.
2. Mobilize the church to put faith into action. A “living it out” campaign would be instituted to give congregants an opportunity to take simple steps of faith to use their talents, abilities, ideas, creativity, and entrepreneurial drive to raise monies for the new Ministry Center through a “Multiply Campaign” patterned after Jesus’ parable of the talents. The intention would be for congregants to utilize this time as an opportunity to see God in action through them and to be able to share their story while also serving the community, giving them a “low risk” conversation starter.
3. Embed the Bible. According to the REVEAL for Churches survey results, the Best Practice of embedding the Bible into every aspect of the life of the church was not as strong as other indicators and an area of needed improvement. Rather than being a

separate intervention, it would be a characteristic of each of the specific interventions and would include greater emphasis on Scripture, the use of inductive Bible study methods in Small Group settings, and the reflection of Scripture on a daily basis.

4. Coordinate all the interventions with the purchase of a new facility. As the church moved forward with the purchase of her first facility after years of being a mobile church, the interventions would incorporate this action into the missional drive of the church. Rather than looking at the purchase of the facility as the culmination of a vision, the church leaders would cast vision that the buildings would be a tool for the greater vision to reach the community.

In addition to the above four guidelines for the interventions, the church would also continue to build spiritual mentoring in an organic manner through efforts that had already begun in 2018 through the implantation of D/Groups, gender specific discipleship groups of three to four people each that meet for three to six months to help people grow spiritually. Even though spiritual mentoring was identified as a recommended as part of the REVEAL for Churches next steps for a vibrant church, it was decided that spiritual mentoring would not be a major emphasis of the church during the one-year intervention year. The existing D/Groups would continue to grow “under the radar”, building to a critical mass over time, before going church wide. Spiritual mentoring is a long-term goal.

The Intervention Design would consist of three main categories:

1. Missional Focused Message Series. The three message series, *Who’s Your One*, *Life on Mission* and *The Way* would focus on different elements of being missional. *Who’s Your One* would incorporate a simple, memorable slogan, “who’s your one” as recommended by the REVEAL for Churches consultation and would focus on

- identifying and praying for one specific person. *Life on Mission* would focus on being equipped to share your faith story, and *The Way* would introduce a discipleship pathway to move forward on the Spiritual Continuum from Exploring Christ to Growing in Christ, to Close to Christ to Christ-Centered. Two of the message series, *Who's Your One*, and *Life on Mission* would be taught in conjunction with the Fall and Winter Small Group launches, and the Small Groups would use inductive Bible study methods to explore passages of Scripture that were related to evangelism.
2. Targeted Invitation Events. The Intervention Design would include the emphasis of challenging the church to invite others on three specific Sundays throughout the year. These three Sundays included two very specific calendar dates when people are inclined to come to a worship service, Christmas and Easter, and one Sunday to be designated, *Invite Your One Sunday*, to be scheduled sometime after the *Who's Your One* series, and it was hoped to be in conjunction with the opening of the new facility.
 3. A Living it Out Campaign. In the consultation with Cally Parkinson of REVEAL, she recommended a "Living it Out Campaign" to encourage the church to be more involved in mission outside the church. One campaign Parkinson wrote about in *Rise: Bold Strategies to Transform Your Church*, involved a church that gave out money to the congregation and challenged them to "multiply it" through various efforts of their choosing. All the proceeds would go to establishing an orphanage in Africa. Bridges would do something similar by giving out one hundred dollars to each family or individual in the church for a specific period of time and then have them return what they earned to the church to go towards a new ministry center that would be part of the new facility the church was purchasing. This would give the participants

opportunities to step out in faith, overcome their fears, see what God could do through them, and then be able to share their personal faith stories based on what they experienced.

These interventions would be scheduled throughout the ensuing year between the first and second surveys to address the most crucial areas in moving the church toward greater missional effectiveness. Because of the fluid nature of purchasing and renovating a facility, the schedule for these interventions would be flexible and done in conjunction with the natural momentum of moving from being a mobile church to a church with a facility to accommodate all the ministries of the church. The coming year would be a time of change and transition for the church.

The Implementation of the Intervention Design

The Multiply Campaign

The intervention implementation began with a campaign that was already in the planning stages. The idea of a Living it Out Campaign was introduced in the book *RISE: Bold Strategies to Transform Your Church* as an example of putting faith into action. Based on an initiative implemented by Christ Community Church in Omaha, Nebraska, the concept of a Living it Out Campaign is to give out “seed money” to the congregation and then ask them to multiply it through projects they design and carry out themselves. At Christ Community Church, over twenty thousand dollars was given out and over four hundred thirty out thousand dollars was returned as church members did various things like race sponsorships, golf outings, yoga classes, grass mowing, and other activities. All of the proceeds went to support a hospital in Africa.

Bridges Church started her inaugural Multiply Campaign on May 19, 2019, by distributing one hundred dollars to each family or individual at the worship services and challenging them to invest it over the summer through their own projects and return whatever profits were earned on or by August 19, 2019. All proceeds would all go to the establishment of the new Bridging the Gap Ministry Center to be housed in the new facility the church was purchasing. This new Ministry Center would be a place to serve the community in multiple ways, helping people rise out of poverty and encounter the love of Christ in the process. This campaign would be step one in a ten-year process of raising two hundred fifty thousand dollars to fully fund this vision.

Over the course of the summer, different members of the church invested their money in various ways. One person took orders for smoked meats and then using his brand-new smoker, cooked the meats, delivered them and collected the proceeds. One couple did a row-a-thon, collecting sponsors who would donate per kilometer the couple rowed on a rowing machine. One family sold a vehicle, bought a cheaper car, and donated the difference. There were other projects such as a yard sale, furniture restoration, hot dog sales, a fifty-fifty raffle, enchiladas sales, gift card raffles and many others. In the end, over four thousand four hundred dollars was distributed and over twenty-four thousand dollars returned.

One of the most important aspects of this initiative was giving the people of Bridges Church opportunities to talk to others about what they were doing, why they were doing it, and what they hoped to see come from it. This built confidence in the people as they saw the willingness of people outside the church to help, but it also allowed them to see God at work through them in ways they had never seen before this project. It was an easy and productive first

step, and the results were so encouraging that many people expressed an interest in not only doing it again but had already developed ideas for doing it better the next time.

Who's Your One?

The Multiply Campaign was followed closely by a message series entitled, *Who's Your One?*, September 15, 2019 through October 6, 2019 and would be the final message series in the school gymnasium the church leased, before moving into her new facility two miles away. It was crucial that the church saw that moving into the new facility was not an end in itself, but an opportunity and a tool to best reach the surrounding community. *Who's Your One* is a resource of the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention and consists of a five week sermon series written by JD Greear and Johnny Hunt, a prayer guide for praying for those who do not yet know Christ, and graphics to help reinforce and focus the message.

The message series was adapted from the material written by Greear and Hunt to best fit the culture and style of Bridges Church. Weekly topics included the value of one person, the advancement of the Kingdom of God, the call of Jesus to follow Him, the mission given to Christ followers by Jesus, and an exploration of the question, "What happens after we die?" Through the series, special attention was given to reinforcing the need to be praying for each person's "one person".

In the consultation with Cally Parkinson of REVEAL, it was clear that the church needed to find a simple, repeatable and easily remembered phrase to help build a missional mindset in the people of the church. "Who's Your One?" became that phrase and focus. This phrase was repeated in the church graphics as part of the message presentation during the Sunday morning worship services, in PUSH notifications sent through the new church application, in emails, and in other communications including Facebook posts. A prayer guide based on this idea was also

distributed to the congregants, who were encouraged to use the prayer guide daily to help focus their prayers for their “one”. The goal was to saturate the five-week period with this message.

Also, in the consultation with Cally Parkison, it was stressed that the church needed to continue to improve in the area of embedding the Bible in everything the church did. To accomplish this, the church brought in a consultant, Kevin Boyd, Scripture Engagement Resources Manager for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, to train the Small Group Leaders in leading an inductive Bible study small group in conjuncture with the *Who’s Your One?* message series. Kevin chose five passages from the Gospel of Matthew for the small groups to study in coordination with the five-week series. These passages included Matthew 8:1-17, Matthew 9:35-10:8, Matthew 13:44-46, Matthew 20:1-16, and Matthew 26:1-16, all passages that demonstrate the missional heart of Jesus. By bringing together the small group system with the message series, it was hoped that a missional mindset would be developed in an even deeper way in the people of Bridges Church.

Invite Your One and the Christmas Season

The first of the three invite events in the year of intervention implementation was scheduled for December 8, 2019. This invite event, *Invite Your One*, was designed to not only follow up on the just finished message series, *Who’s Your One?* but to also coincide with the opening of the new church facility. Allowing for a month of renovations, followed by a month of working out all the new systems and logistics for operating in the new facility, and a period of ramping up Facebook advertisements and personal invitations, December 8, 2019 was seen as an ideal date for people to invite someone to church. In the year leading up to this date, the church averaged one hundred six people per week in attendance. On *Invite Your One Sunday*, there were one hundred sixty-nine in attendance, an increase of almost sixty percent. It was an exciting day

for the people to see the new facility filled to near capacity in the two worship services held that day.

Because the *Invite Your One* event fell in December, it then became part of a greater push to invite the community to come to Bridges for the Christmas season, and in some ways the two events became one larger one. Through a greater expenditure for Facebook advertisements, the church posted invitations to the Christmas services to reach the community. The congregants were also encouraged to reach out to others. In the ensuing two weeks between *Invite Your One* and Christmas, the church attendance continued to be higher than the yearly average, with one hundred thirty-six in attendance on December 15, 2019 and one hundred eighteen on December 22, 2019. Between the new facility and the greater emphasis on living life on mission, there was a noticeable increase in excitement and missional momentum building in the congregation following the years of stagnation, decline and minimal growth.

Message Series: Life on Mission

A new message series to coincide with the launch of small groups for the winter and spring session began on January 19, 2020 and was designed to continue the focus on living a missional lifestyle. Called, *Life on Mission*, the series was based on the resource with the same name from the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. The focus of this series and small group curriculum was on equipping the congregation to share their faith story using the 3 Circles method, which was adapted to better fit the language and culture of Bridges Church. The series was a step-by-step look at learning how to have spiritual conversations with others that were non-threatening, relationship building and Gospel centric. This was modeled through selected congregants sharing their faith stories as part of the Sunday morning worship experience.

The small group curriculum consisted of another round of Inductive Bible studies, using passages of Scripture from the books of John and Acts, again focused on events from the life of Jesus and the apostles that were evangelistic in nature. Small group members took turns each week sharing their faith stories with feedback and encouragement from the other group members. In addition, the new church application was used to send out daily Bible verses through the PUSH notification system, continuing the work of embedding the Bible into every aspect of the life of the church. The goal was to prepare each person to be able to have spiritual conversations with others that were natural and life giving.

Message Series: The Way

A third message series, *The Way*, was added to convey the full meaning of a missional life to make disciples who make disciples, not just converts. This 4-week series would present the spiritual continuum introduced by the REVEAL for Churches survey, examining the four stages in discipleship using the metaphor of chairs representing the individual stages as described by Dann Spader in his work, *4 Chair Discipling: Growing a Movement of Disciplemakers*. To illustrate the four stages, four different chairs were used as examples of each stage. A three-legged, folding camping chair represented the stage of Exploring Christ, a student chair and desk represented the stage of Growing in Christ, a two-seat folding, camp chair represented Close to Christ, and a tall, director's chair represented Christ-Centered, depicting Jesus as the one to be followed. The series was interrupted by a new world-wide development, the advent of a pandemic, Covid-19, which would change the way Bridges "did church" for the foreseeable future.

Covid-19, Easter, and Moving to Online Services

Easter 2020 was to be the focal point of the missional efforts of the year of interventions, with a concentrated effort to apply everything that had been taught, learned, and implemented. The congregation had been equipped to step out in faith, trust God, share their stories and live out their mission. Regular prayer walks were instituted weekly through the Lent season as volunteers prayed over the church campus and then out into the community, seeking the work of the Holy Spirit and laying the spiritual groundwork for a greater harvest. Easter would be the time to reach out to the community, build relationships and share the Gospel. With the Corona - 19 pandemic, everything changed. In mid-March, the Governor of North Carolina issued orders that prevented churches from meeting in large groups inside and to practice social distancing if meeting outdoors with restrictions in place to limit outdoor gatherings.

The leadership faced a difficult decision between shutting down completely, meeting outdoors in a limited capacity, or moving to online services. It was important to consider all involved, protecting the vulnerable, keeping everyone safe and yet still pursuing the mission of reaching the lost. The leadership of Bridges Church decided that the best solution that would address all three issues was to move to fully online worship services and small groups. On March 22, 2020, using an iPhone perched upon a tripod in front of the stage, the worship services were recorded live and broadcast through Facebook Live, which was determined to be the best venue to continue to build relationships and fellowship using the different community building tools within Facebook. The church used all of her communication tools including emails, Facebook posts, PUSH notifications and phone calls to communicate this change and to encourage the congregation to invite others to watch online. The weekly worship services followed the same

basic format as before the change, and all small groups that had been meeting in person all moved to an online format using either Zoom, Webex, or some other portal.

The decision was made to continue to pursue the missional intent already established. The church began to adopt the motto, “adapt and overcome” and to look at this very difficult time as an opportunity to reach the world. As the metrics on worship service viewership began to come in from Facebook Live over the first view weeks, it became apparent that in addition to the regular attenders watching, there was a growing national and international interest too. There was a regular “attende” in Sweden, one in New York City, another in New Hampshire, one near Newport News, Virginia, a missionary couple serving on an Apache Reservation near the city of Globe, Arizona, as well as several people in California. Each of these people had what became to be called “relational proximity” to someone in the Bridges community, and each week they “checked in” through the comments posted on the live stream. They were connected through friendships or family relationships or some other connection. It became clear that in this new environment, relational proximity became more important in many ways than geographical proximity to the church facility. These connections were a revelation to the church leadership as an unintentional, but enlightening aspect of living life on mission. Using technology opened up the entire world as a mission field.

The leadership then made the decision to pursue a greater and better online presence. This meant the purchase of additional technology to better enhance the quality of the online presentation. New robotic cameras were purchased and installed over the months as well as additional computers, mixers, lights and other equipment what would allow the church to broadcast through multiple formats and platforms so that the online presence would continue even after churches were allowed to meet again in person in a greater capacity.

Easter was only four weeks away when the church moved to an online presence only. The prayer walks continued on a weekly basis but now with social distancing in place. As Easter approached, the church began to take other steps to reach out through social media and to mobilize the congregation to do the same through their personal contacts. Each week in the online worship services, the people were encouraged to invite others within their sphere of influence to “attend” Easter at Bridges online. During the week before Easter, a series of videos, put together by the Senior Pastor, were released daily teaching through the daily events of the Passion Week. Shot in different settings throughout the community, these short videos made with no cost and with simple equipment soon began to reach a wide group of people. The church Facebook followers were encouraged to share these videos with others, and the church Facebook page began to pick up many new followers. Within a few short weeks, the church’s reach was greater than it had ever been through social media.

In the weeks between going fully online and Easter, the church conducted a mini survey to determine how many people were actually “attending” and watching online. The metrics given by Facebook seemed much too large to be considered reliable. It was determined that the best indicator of how many people should be counted was found in the Peak Live Viewership Facebook metrics, showing how many Facebook accounts are open to the broadcast post throughout the service. Then, an average was taken of the number of accounts open on the post near the beginning of the service and the number of accounts open at the end of the service to arrive at a specific number of “attendees” each week. Based on mini survey of thirty people identified as having opened the post each week, it was determined that an average number of 2.1 people were watching the service through each post. Then, the average number of Facebook accounts actively open during the service was multiplied times 2.1 to determine a total weekly

“attendance.” Though a number of people watch the recorded service after it is live, those numbers were not included in the weekly attendance.

On Easter morning, a sunrise service was added, the first on the church’s new campus. Broadcast live on Facebook Live; it too was broadcast through a simple set up using an iPhone on a tripod and featured a short message and live acoustic worship. Following this service, the church conducted her Easter services using the new technology that had been acquired. While the only people in the room were the worship band, speaker and volunteers to run the technology, everyone else would be online.

After the attendance numbers were calculated for the day, it was announced that a total of one hundred ninety-one people “attended” the Easter service, which is eighty percent higher than the average weekly attendance for the previous year, and one of the highest attended days in the history of the church. Due to the Covid-19 restrictions, it was not a normal Easter service, and there was no way to know just how many people would have attended without the restrictions. When the year of interventions began, it was hoped that Easter 2020 would be a culmination of everything the church had put into place through the interventions, including a large attendance, new attenders and baptisms. With Covid-19, everything changed. Yet, there was no doubt that the missional temperature was going up, and the church culture was changing. The next step would be to conduct a second REVEAL for Churches survey to determine what, if any real change had occurred in the lives of the people.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Chapter Four will present the results from the REVEAL for Churches survey conducted at Bridges Church, April 26 through May 10, 2020, following one year of interventions. The original plan was to conduct the survey in 2020 in the same manner as was done in 2019. The Covid-19 pandemic and resulting safety protocols implemented in the state of North Carolina changed that plan. In the second week of March 2020, the governor of North Carolina instituted restrictions on indoor gatherings, limiting group size to ten or less. Churches in North Carolina adapted by either going online with their services, moving their services outdoors, or in some cases, canceling services altogether. Bridges Church moved her worship services online, using Facebook Live.

Moving to online services affected the methods of communication regarding the REVEAL for Churches survey and, in a small way, the way the survey was conducted. In the weeks leading up to the survey in 2019, the church worship guide included regular announcements and inserts explaining the survey and encouraging the congregants to participate. When the church went online, the regular worship guide was discontinued. In 2019, flyers and posters were displayed in the entrance area of the rented school where the church was meeting at the time. With the discontinuation of in-person worship services, posters and flyers in the church facility would no longer be seen. The church had to adapt to the new circumstances.

In order to get the word out about the follow-up survey in 2020, social media and technology were put to greater use. Emails, PUSH notifications through the church application, and Facebook posts were created and disseminated to the congregants in the month leading up to the survey. A weekly worship guide was added to the church application, containing message notes and announcements, including announcements about the survey. An announcement time

was added into the worship services, between the message and the music, in the middle of the service when the most people were engaged, and in the weeks leading up to the survey, the people were encouraged to participate in the survey with instructions for how to take it.

One big change between the way the survey was administered in 2019 and 2020 was in the restriction of only including people who had attended Bridges for longer than six months and had experienced at least one-half year of the interventions. This limitation was communicated through the various methods used to inform the church about the survey. Using the church data base, the survey link was only sent to congregants who met these criteria when the survey was opened.

Because the church facility was not open for in-person worship services during the survey period and social interaction was limited, the church was unable to provide a laptop to demonstrate how to take the survey or to allow anyone to take the survey on it. Each participant would need to use their own devices, including laptops, desktops, tablets, or a smart phone. In 2019, no one actually took the survey using a church computer, but some did ask questions about it at that time. The lack of in-person interaction during the pandemic could have had an effect on who would take the survey in 2020.

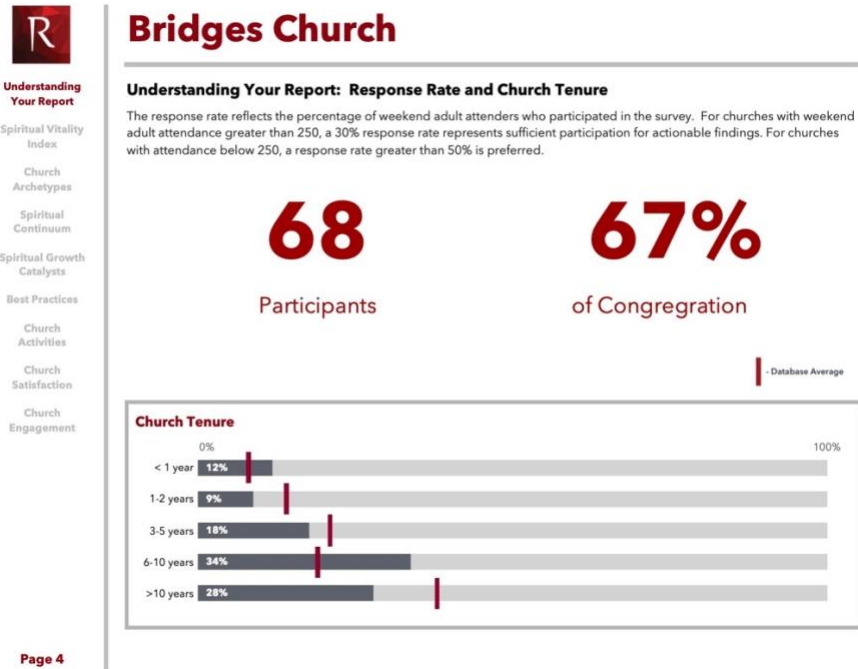
However, in most ways, the REVEAL for Churches was administered in the same way in 2020 and 2019. The church leadership consisting of the elders, ministry team leaders, and small group leaders, all were able to take the survey in the two weeks before it was opened up to the rest of the church. Again, the survey was open for two weeks, April 25 through May 10, 2020. The results were made available to the church leadership on May 12, 2020, and a consultation with Cally Parkinson, Communications Director of REVEAL was held, June 1, 2020 to review the results.

As in 2019, the survey was anonymous, with no tracking of respondents from 2019 to 2020. There would be no direct comparisons made in individual results from one year to the other. REVEAL for Churches does not measure an individual's spiritual growth, but the church body overall. Because of this, the surveys would be comparing the church as a whole from the initial survey to the follow up one after the interventions. The results would be analyzed and reviewed as such, exploring the spiritual growth of a group of respondents rather than as individual congregants.

Results

The REVEAL for Churches survey was modified in some ways between 2019 and 2020. Most of the changes would be small but some would affect how spiritual vibrancy, the main focus of this research, would be reported. The results of the survey and a comparison of the results of the 2020 survey with the results of the 2019 survey will be explored in this section. Rather than examining each of the findings of the 2020 survey, only those which affect the spiritual vibrancy of the church or which differ in significant ways from the 2019 survey will be examined in this section.

Response Rate, Church Tenure, and Demographics



In 2020, sixty-eight respondents took part in the REVEAL for Churches survey, the same number of people who participated in 2019. This would make comparisons between the surveys more dependable. When examining the tenure of the congregants, one item stands out, and that is the rise in the percentage of those with a tenure of six to ten years. In 2019, the report revealed that twenty-six percent of the respondents fell in this category. In 2020, thirty-four percent of the respondents reported a tenure of six-ten years. This is an increase of eight percent from one year to the next. In the consultation with Cally Parkinson, this change was attributed to the extra year between the surveys, meaning that many of those who had been part of the church for five years were now in their sixth year, indicating that people were staying longer with the church, which is significant in a church that was only twelve years old at the time of the survey. Longevity in tenure was increasing. This is one sign of possible satisfaction with the church, a factor that is explored later in the survey.



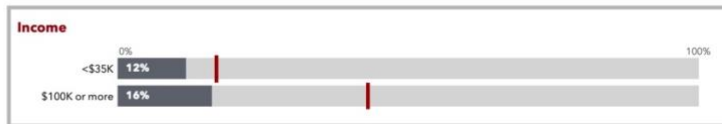
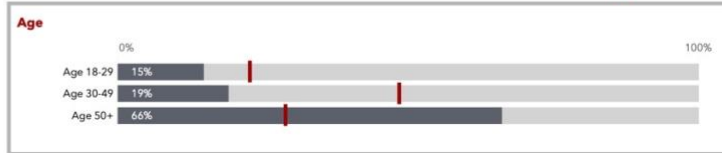
Understanding Your Report

- Spiritual Vitality Index
- Church Archetypes
- Spiritual Continuum
- Spiritual Growth Catalysts
- Best Practices
- Church Activities
- Church Satisfaction
- Church Engagement

Bridges Church

Understanding Your Report: Demographic Profile

This profile of demographics and church tenure is an important "check" for church leaders. If the information provided here closely mirrors the congregation you see at weekend services, you can feel confident that the survey results reflect your whole church family.



Important Note: Pastors frequently say that the percentage of young adults (ages 18-29) in their REVEAL demographic profile is lower than their weekend services percentage. If your results align with this trend, recognize that many REVEAL churches experience this same thing, which means our database average should be a reasonable comparative measure for your young adults.

In many ways, the 2020 mirrors the 2019 in the area of demographics with two significant differences. One difference is in the age of the congregation, specifically in the number of those in the fifty plus category. In 2019, there were fifty-nine percent; in 2020, that percentage went up to sixty-six. The congregation is getting older and may be something the church will need to look at in the years to come, with a possible need to emphasize reaching people in younger demographics.

The second demographic factor that draws attention is in the ethnic makeup of the respondents. Non-whites made up seven percent of the respondents in 2019, and that percentage went up to thirteen percent in 2020. This is a significant trend for a church that desires to be more ethnically diverse, especially a church in the United States South. According to the REVEAL for Churches research, Vibrant Churches are more likely to be diverse than churches of other archetypes.¹⁷⁵ Ethnic diversity is a benchmark of churches that exist in an ethnically

¹⁷⁵ Parkinson and Scammacca-Lewis, *RISE*, p. 139, 140.

diverse community, a community they desire to reach with the Gospel if they are missionally driven. Bridges Church showed vibrant growth in this area.

Spiritual Vitality Index

In the REVEAL for Churches survey, the greatest indicators of spiritual vitality are found in the Spiritual Vitality Index scores and the identified church archetype. These two categories are the best summarizers of growth or lack thereof in surveys of different years, and the focus of the report created by the REVEAL for Churches team. It is in these two categories that Bridges Church would most discover if the interventions had been effective.

In the ensuing year between the survey in 2019 and the one in 2020, REVEAL for Churches made changes in how they scored the Spiritual Vitality Index. In surveys conducting before 2020, the Spiritual Vitality Index was based on a numerical score based on an average scale based on the American school system, where a score of seventy is considered average. In the 2020 survey, the Spiritual Vitality Index was now reported in a percentile scale that compares individual churches to all other churches that have participated in the survey. This change would require additional information from the REVEAL for Churches consultant to be able to make comparisons between the 2019 and 2020 Spiritual Vitality Index scores.

In 2019, Bridges Church received a score of seventy-five on the Spiritual Vitality Index, five points higher than the average score of all other churches that had taken the survey to date, approximately one thousand, six-hundred seventy-five churches with over six-hundred thousand respondents. In 2020, the Spiritual Vitality Index would be indicated by a percentile ranking.



Bridges Church

Understanding Your Report

Spiritual Vitality Index

Church Archetypes

Spiritual Continuum

Spiritual Growth Catalysts

Best Practices

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Church Engagement

Page 6

Spiritual Vitality Index

The Spiritual Vitality Index is an aggregate measure of the spiritual maturity of a congregation and discipleship effectiveness of a church. The percentile score reflects how your church's results compare to the results of other churches in the REVEAL dataset. For example, a score of 65 means your result is higher than 65% of churches in the REVEAL dataset.

99



Church's Role	99	Personal Spiritual Practices	97	Faith in Action	91
<p>This measure reflects how a congregation feels about your church's effectiveness in three key areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps Me Develop a Personal Relationship with Christ • Helps Me Understand the Bible in Depth • Challenges Me to Grow and Take Next Steps 		<p>This measure reflects a congregation's ongoing interaction with God:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection on Scripture • Prayer to Seek Guidance • Financial Giving to the Church 		<p>This measure reflects the congregation's willingness to serve God:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evangelism • Serving Those in Need • Total Surrender to Christ 	

The Spiritual Vitality Index which is based on three factors, the church's role in helping her congregants grow spiritually, the personal spiritual practices of the congregants, and the congregants experience of putting their faith into action, is the main indicator REVEAL Churches uses to help a church understand how they are doing in helping their congregants grow in their spiritual vitality, their love for God and their love for others. In 2020, Bridges Church fell into the ninety-ninth percentile, meaning that her scores placed her in the top one percent of all churches who have taken the survey to date. After one year of interventions and years of prayer and intentional teaching and actions and the powerful work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the people, the church was indeed showing spiritual fruit. While the church in America overall may not be healthy, Bridges Church at least was in the top percentile of those churches.

To further understand these findings and to better understand the growth experienced in the year between surveys, consultant Cally Parkinson was able to walk the elders of Bridges Church through the results and the differences between the way the two surveys were scored. In the consultation, she explained that the REVEAL for Churches staff had gone back to the 2019

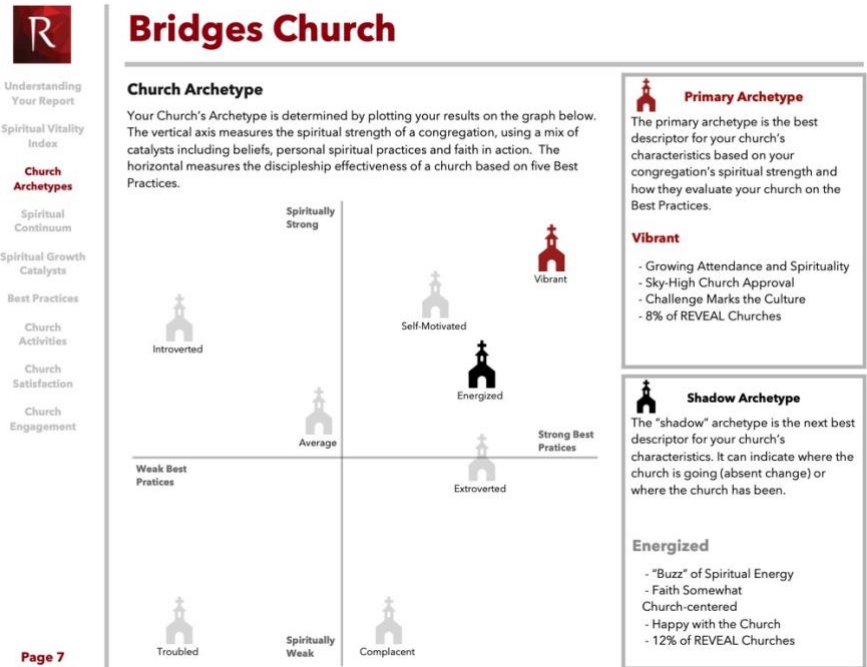
Bridges Church survey report to calculate the percentile rankings for the Spiritual Vitality Index to make the two reports more compatible, comparing percentiles to percentiles.

Using these new calculations, the Spiritual Vitality Index percentile ranking in 2019 would have been ninety-five, meaning Bridges Church would have been in the top five percentile of all churches. Thus, in the ensuing year, Bridges moved up four percentile rankings from ninety-five to ninety-nine, a significant gain. In correlation, the church's role in helping people grow in their spiritual life went from the eighty-eighth percentile to the ninety-ninth percentile. The church's faith in action percentile went from eighty-six to ninety-one, while the personal spiritual practices of the congregants stayed the same from 2019 to 2020, with a percentile of ninety-seven. The biggest gain was in the perception of the people in the role of the church during the intervention year, moving up eleven percentile rankings. The actions taken by the church over the intervention year were seen by the congregants as having directly helped them experience spiritual growth. The intentional focus between 2019 and 2020 showed very positive results, as the church took steps of faith, and God responded in and through them. It was apparent that real spiritual change, led by the Holy Spirit was occurring in the lives of the people.

Church Archetype

One of the most significant findings of the REVEAL for Churches studies has been in the area of identifying churches as one of eight archetypes, each archetype being part of a continuum from troubled to vibrant. Based on the results of thousands of churches, each church archetype encapsulates the major characteristics of churches within a grouping of findings. A church is placed within a specific archetype based on their survey results and is also assigned a "shadow archetype", an archetype whose findings are next closest to those of the participating church. The use of church archetypes assists individual churches in determining their spiritual vibrancy and

in determining next steps to move up the continuum toward even greater vibrancy. By taking the survey more than once, churches can see what if any growth has occurred in intervening years between surveys.



In the 2020 survey results, Bridges Church fell once again in the Vibrant Church archetype, a church that is characterized as growing in attendance and spirituality, high church approval and satisfaction, and a culture that challenges and inspires. Only eight percent of all churches in the REVEAL for Churches database are considered vibrant churches. Vibrant churches are certainly not perfect, but they do display a greater life and vitality than other churches in North America. In the intervention year, Bridges did not slip backward in vitality, a testament to ongoing growth and an avoidance of stagnancy.

One notable change in church archetypes between 2019 and 2020, was found in the “shadow archetype.” In 2019, the shadow archetype indicated by the survey was “self-motivated”, a church of spiritual depth and growth but with individuals taking a greater role in their own spiritual well-being, while desiring that the church do more to help them. Thus, they

are more self-motivated. Energized churches take a stronger role in providing their congregants with inspiration, events, activities, teaching, and tools to foster spiritual growth. In the intervening year between surveys, the people recognized the efforts of the church to take a greater role in their spiritual growth. In both 2019 and 2020, the vibrant church archetype was much more dominant than the shadow archetype, but the change from self-motivated to energized is a good indicator of the effects of the interventions.

Spiritual Continuum

After dedicating a message series, *The Way*, to the church's new spiritual pathway, and a year of interventions, the question arose of what if any change in the church's percentage of people in each category in the Spiritual Continuum would be. Would more people be Christ-Centered? Would there be a "shift to the right" across the board of spiritual growth? The results were surprising.

The Spiritual Continuum results are presented in the following way. Each of the four stages, Christ-Centered to Exploring Christ are reporting as percentages of the congregation, Christ-Centered listed reported as twenty-eight percent, Close to Christ as twenty-six percent, Growing in Christ, forty-one percent and Exploring Christ, four percent. The chart also includes the percentage of each of the stages in the survey database, indicating by the lighter gray bar below the church's results. Thus, the percent of respondents from Bridges Church in the Christ-Centered stage in 2020 was twenty-eight percent compared to the average in the database of twenty-four percent. Each of the stages reflect this reporting.



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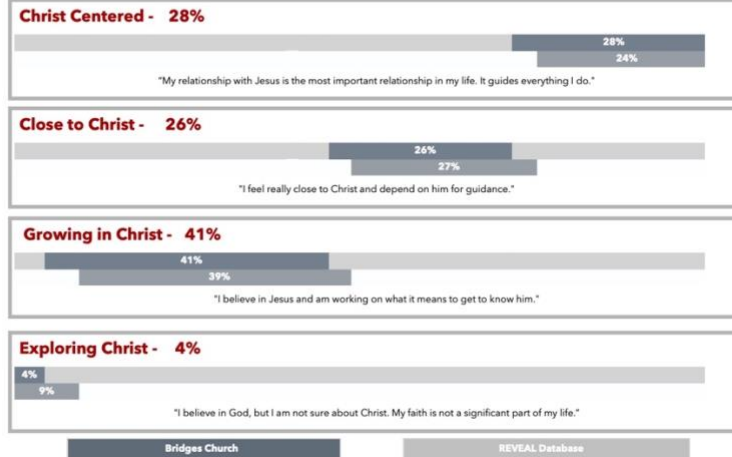
Church Engagement

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Bridges Church

Spiritual Continuum

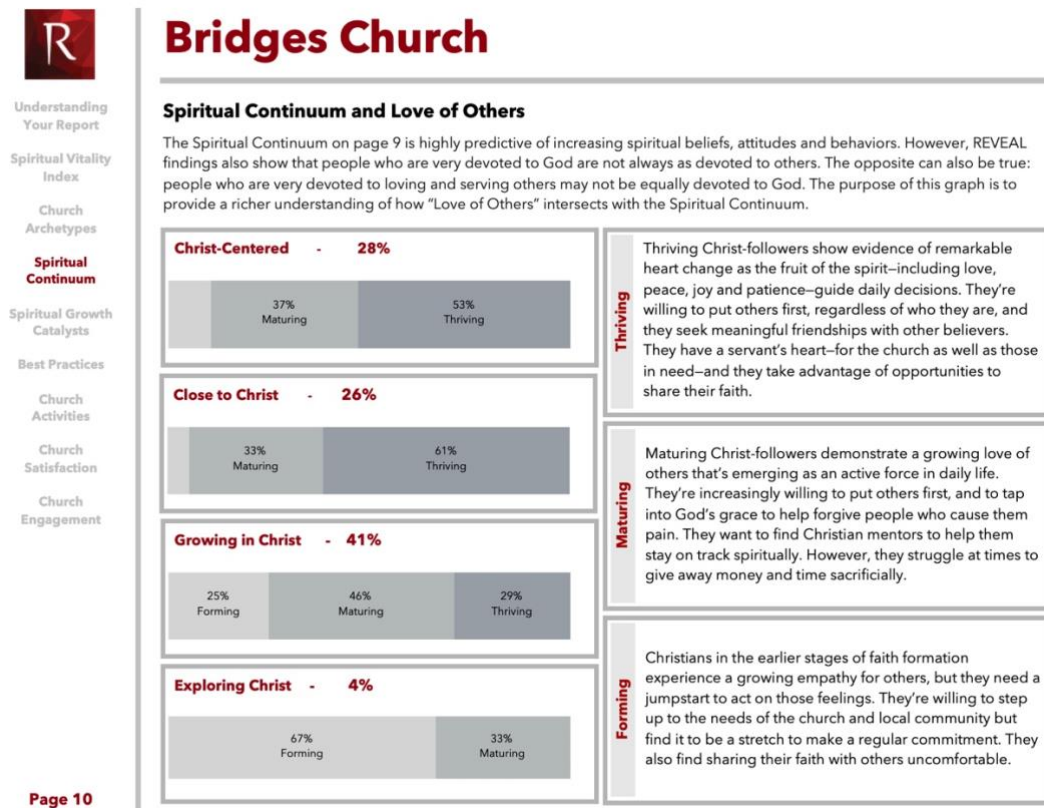
The Spiritual Continuum groups congregants based on the self-described closeness of their relationship with Jesus Christ. The hallmark finding of REVEAL is that this Continuum is highly predictive of the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that are associated with increased love of God. The statement under each bar is characteristic of the way in which people in that segment describe their faith in Christ.



Between 2019 and 2020, there was no change in the Exploring Christ segment, four percent in each year. There was a little growth in the number of those in the Christ-Centered segment from twenty-five percent to twenty-eight percent. The biggest change was in the Close to Christ and Growing in Christ segments. In 2019, Close to Christ was the largest segment at thirty-eight percent, but in 2020, Growing in Christ was the largest segment at forty-one percent. It was almost a complete switch and a step backward for many. This is hard to explain. Perhaps, some people, after hearing the message series, *The Way*, scored lower than before with a better understanding of what following Jesus really means. Perhaps, people took a step back in their walk with Christ, love for Him, and commitment to Him. The majority of the people, fifty-four percent were still in the top two segments of the spiritual continuum, Close to Christ and Christ-Centered, but this would be an interesting phenomenon for future study.

Because the Spiritual Growth continuum is an indicator of the church's love for others, it is of vital importance in determining the health of a church. For a church to grow in vitality, the people need to be growing in their love for God and their love for other people. Though the

survey is anonymous, and the individual respondents may be different from 2019 to 2020, the overall love of Christ within the church is critical in creating vibrancy. A new category was added to the REVEAL for Churches survey that takes a deeper look at this issue, and this new category, Spiritual Continuum and Love of Others measures the change of heart due to the work of the Holy Spirit in growing the fruit of the Spirit, specifically in the areas of friendship and service. Respondents in the four categories in the Spiritual Continuum would be classified in one of three qualities, thriving, maturing, and forming, with thriving being the ones demonstrating the most heart change.



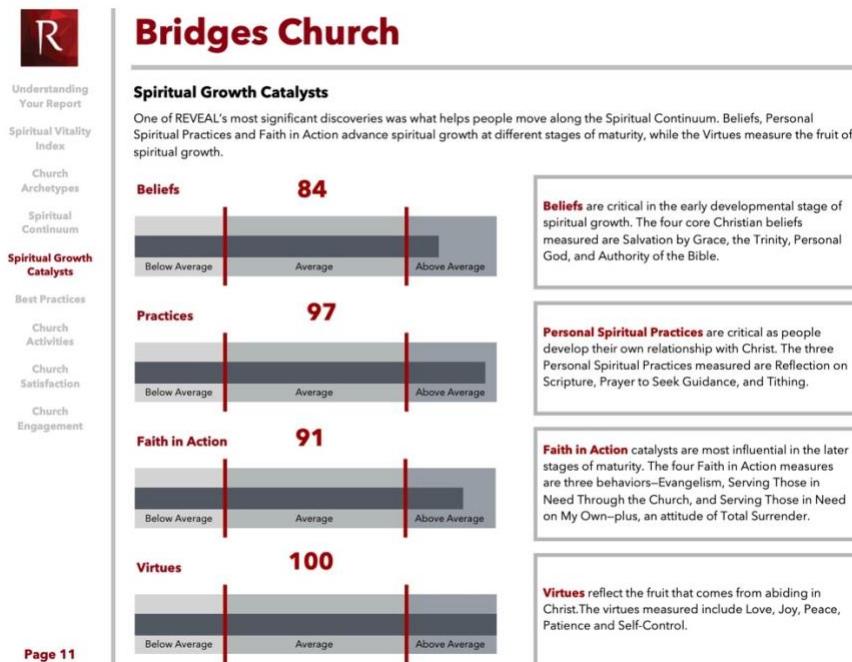
Bridges Church respondents in the Growing in Christ through Christ-Centered showed ongoing growth toward loving others, with the majority in these three categories either in the thriving or maturing stages. Those in the Exploring Christ category were mostly in the forming stage,

indicating a need for further growth, which is not unexpected considering their current relationship with Christ.

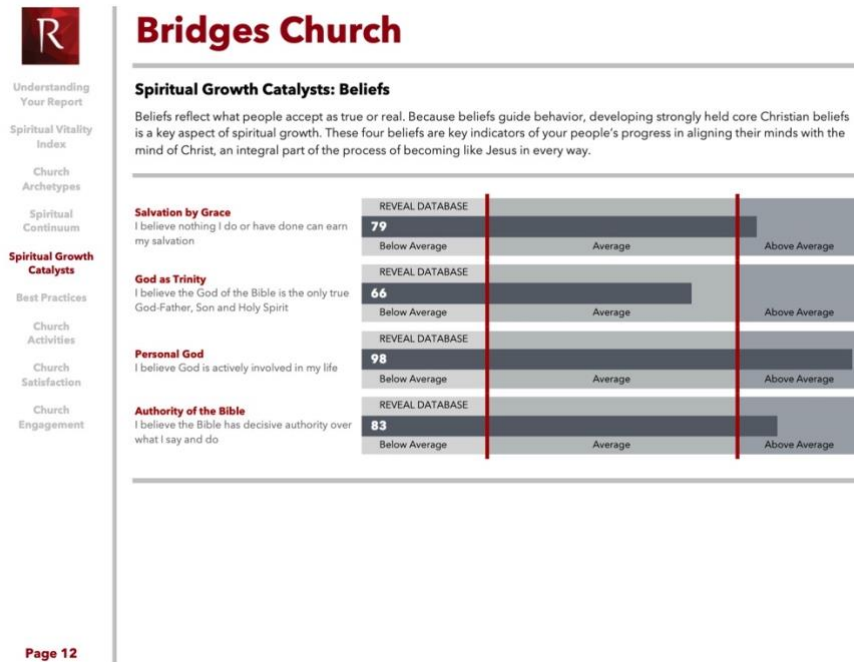
Overall, Bridges Church will need to continue to encourage her members to grow in their love for Christ and for others. The “step back” for many from Close to Christ to Growing in Christ would suggest that greater prayer and emphasis on this aspect of spiritual growth is warranted. Continued work on providing steps to help people move forward on the Spiritual Continuum is necessary in moving forward in building church vitality.

Spiritual Growth Catalysts

One possible area to explore in looking for a possible answer to the question of why there was a change in the percentage of people in each segment of the Spiritual Continuum can be found in the scores in the Spiritual Growth Catalysts category. Spiritual Growth Catalysts are specific helps in moving people along the spiritual continuum. They include key beliefs, practices, faith in action behaviors, and virtues which measure the growth in spiritual fruit.



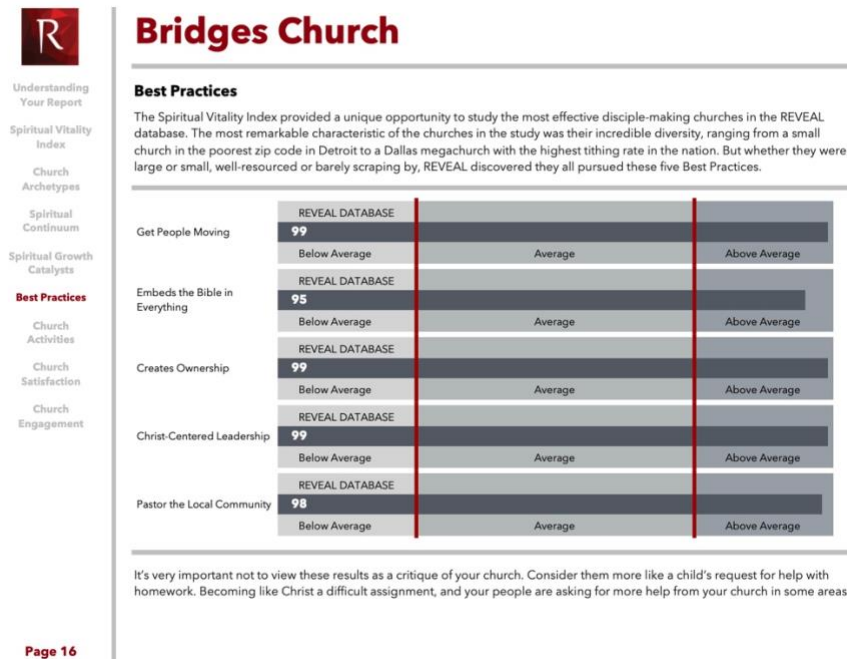
Three of the catalysts, virtues, faith in action, and practices all scored well above average. Beliefs, however, scored the lowest at eighty- four, which would indicate the need of a closer observation of this specific catalyst.



In a further examination of the Spiritual Growth Catalysts, in the area of Belief, three individual beliefs were lower than expected. Salvation by grace, an essential belief, scored a seventy-nine, God as Trinity a sixty-six, and the authority of the Bible only an eighty-three. All three of these beliefs are core beliefs of the church, and these findings were unexpected and warrant further teaching and emphasis in moving forward as a church. In comparison to 2019, the belief in the authority of the Bible actually went up by seventeen percent, a welcome sign. The belief in salvation by grace stayed the same, but the belief in the Trinity dropped by twenty-seven percentage points. The teachings on the belief in the Trinity did not change over the ensuing year, and there was no significant discussion on this core belief. This change would be worth looking into more.

Best Practices

In the development of the REVEAL for Churches research, a key finding of churches identified as growing and vibrant was in the idea of Best Practices, five common characteristics shared by all. These five best practices, Get People Moving, Embed the Bible in Everything, Create Ownership, Christ-Centered Leadership, and Pastor the Local Community are crucial in building a healthy church, and Bridges Church has been building on them since being introduced to REVEAL.



Across the board, the scores for the best practices were very high and above average in 2020. The incorporation of the five Best Practices continued to be a strength of the church, though there is always a need for improvement. Because the 2019 survey results were presented in a different format than the 2020 results, it is difficult to compare the two years with accuracy. In 2019, the five Best Practices were presented on a six-point scale mirroring the six responses from Disagree to Strongly Agree in each category, with change rankings presented in a five-category continuum from Well Below Average to Well Above Average. In 2020, the scores were ranked

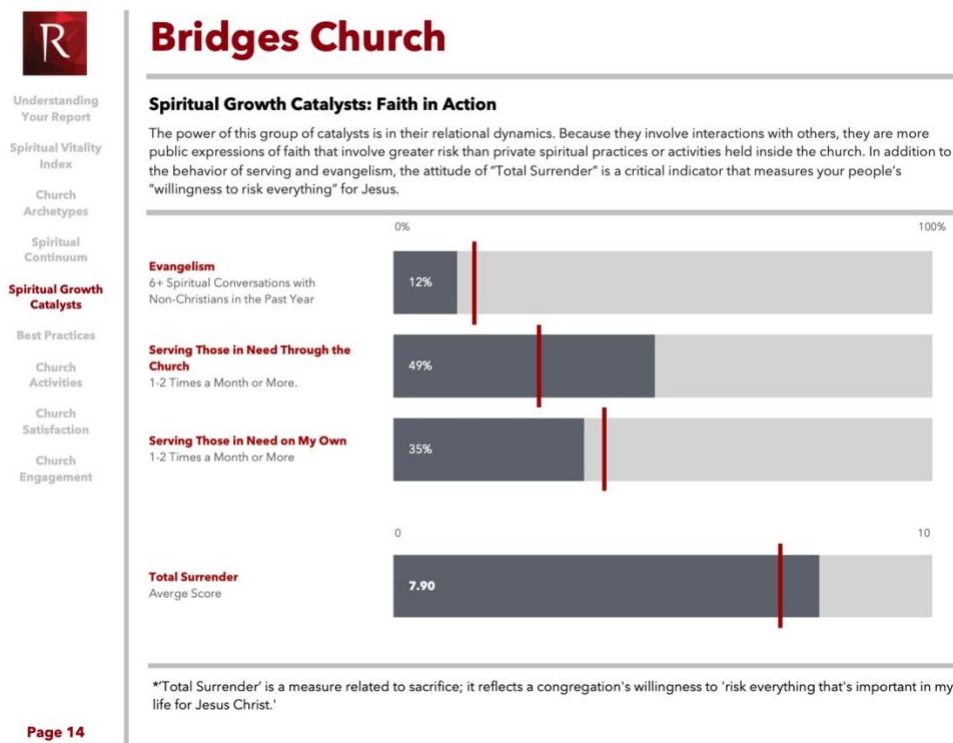
in only a three-category continuum from Below Average to Above Average, based on percentile ranking, which is an across-the-board change made to the 2020 report. Looking at the percentile rankings, all five Best Practices rankings are ninety-five and above, placing Bridges in the top five percent of all churches in each practice. This percentile ranking was not available in the 2019 report. Thus, a direct comparison is not possible, but this does not make an assessment of change impossible. Overall, in 2019, all the practices, except for Embed the Bible, were well above average with Embed the Bible indicated as average.

This made Embed the Bible a key focus of the year of interventions with the incorporation of two inductive Bible studies in the small groups, one in the fall session and the other in the winter/spring session. During the intervention year, the PUSH notification feature of the church application was used to send out Bible verses to the congregants, and the people were encouraged to take time daily to read and reflect on Scripture. Reflection on Scripture, a Spiritual Growth Practice included in both the 2019 and 2020 surveys, went up six percentage points, from twenty-eight to thirty-four percent, showing real growth in the lives of the people over the intervention year. Bible teaching has long been an emphasis at Bridges Church, and this has continued. Because of the change in the way the survey scored Embed the Bible from 2019 to 20, it is difficult to ascertain exactly how much change actually occurred. However, moving from average to above average indicated that there was improvement in this category.

Evangelism

For a church to experience a missional resurgence, she must mobilize together to reach out to the surrounding community and to the greater world around them with the Gospel message. To experience true missional resurgence, the church should equip and prepare the congregants to live life on mission, ready to share the Gospel message of Jesus Christ and their

own faith story. “Every member a missionary” is one way to communicate this concept. A key undercurrent of almost every intervention from 2019 to 2020 was preparing and attempting to inspire the church to reach out within their sphere of influence to those who do not know Christ and begin praying for them and looking for opportunities to have spiritual conversations with them. The messages series, *Who’s Your One* and *Life on Mission*, were intentionally focused on these very topics. With very practical training alongside theological teaching on evangelism, it was hoped that real change would occur in the lives of the church. The 2020 report revealed something unexpected.



After a full year of interventions, the score for “Evangelism: 6+ Spiritual Conversations with Non-Christians in the Past Year,” dropped from twenty-five percent to twelve percent, a decrease by almost fifty percent. This was not only unexpected, but also disappointing to the leadership of the church. In this one area, the church not only failed to move forward, it went in the wrong

direction. In 2019, the church was considered average in this area. In 2020, the church was considered below average. This would warrant a deeper look in the future. In the 2019 study there was a category for how many respondents felt equipped to have a spiritual conversation with others, but that was not included in the 2020 survey. Going forward the church leadership will need to continue to look for ways to equip and prepare the church to be on mission.

There are several possible explanations for this decline in the percent of respondents who had 6+ or more spiritual conversations with non-believers. Because the survey is anonymous, the individuals from one year to the next could be a different set. It would only require a change in nine people to cause this decline, by taking the difference between seventeen which is twenty-five percent of sixty-eight of total respondents, and eight which is twelve percent of sixty-eight respondents. With a change of only nine people from one year to the next, the percent of people in this category could change drastically. The decline could also be contributed to an attribute of the church that at first glance might appear to be a strength. Because satisfaction increased significantly and the people's love for the church has always been very high, people may be placing a high value of being part of a community and experiencing the sense of fellowship that creates. Living a missional life may not be as important to someone who is looking for a place to belong and is experiencing that. This could be causing the church to look more "inward" than "outward." Another cause in this decline could also be attributed to the fact that in the year of interventions, the leadership did not model what it looked like to have spiritual conversations with non-believers. Examples were given on how to share your faith story in organic ways, but there were no stories presented of the staff or other leaders actually doing that. Leaders must lead in order to change the culture. It is not enough to simply teach on a subject without actually living it. In the early years of the church, when the missional culture was much stronger, the

Lead Pastor was able to share stories of having spiritual conversations with others and then over time seeing them become part of the church. At this point in his life, his two sons were actively involved in community activities, and opportunities to meet spiritual seekers were abundant. Since those early days, as his sons have gotten older and have moved on from these activities, the Lead Pastor has had less of these natural connections and therefore less opportunities to share his faith and correspondingly less opportunities to share examples with the church. To truly see real growth in the area of evangelism the leaders of Bridges Church must first set the example. The work continues.

Church Satisfaction

A vibrant church demonstrates a love for Christ and for others, and a great love or satisfaction with the church overall. Respondents who show satisfaction with the church see the church as having a positive role in their spiritual formation. In the 2019 report, the respondents indicated that the role the church played in their overall spiritual health was not as strong as their own faith in action and their own personal spiritual practices. The intervention year would need to focus on improving the church's role in helping congregants grow spiritually. The Church Satisfaction Index would measure how the people perceive the impact of the church's efforts in their spiritual lives.



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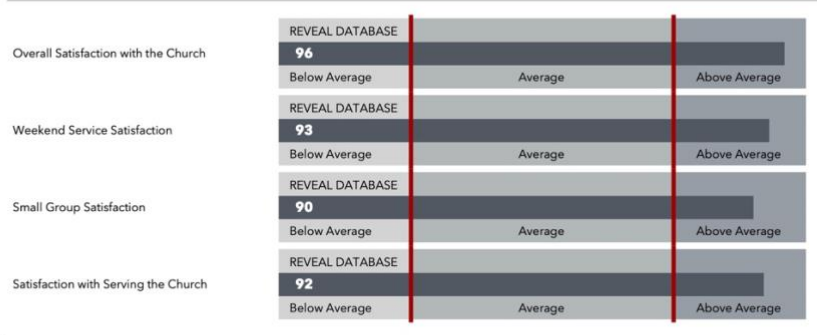
Church Activities

Church Satisfaction

Church Engagement

Satisfaction: Church

REVEAL measures satisfaction with the church in each area below in the context of spiritual growth. Congregants rated how satisfied they are with the role of the church, weekend services, small groups and serving in promoting their spiritual growth.



In the percentile rankings for four key categories, Overall Satisfaction with the Church, Weekend Service Satisfaction, Small Group Satisfaction, and Satisfaction with Serving the Church, Bridges Church ranked in the ninety percentile or above. Overall Satisfaction with the Church placed Bridges Church in the ninety- sixth percentile, in the top four percent of all churches in the REVEAL for Churches database. In the intervention year, there was tremendous growth in how satisfied the people were with the church and her programs, services, and people. This growth in church satisfaction is a reflection of a healthier morale and overall perception of the church over the years, from the years of decline through the present day. Revitalization is an ongoing work, but real, substantial, positive change has been occurring in this season in the life of the church.

Church Engagement

For the 2020 survey, REVEAL for Churches introduced a new metric to measure church engagement, which speaks to how people participate in the life of the church and how effective church life is in helping them grow spiritually. The more engaged someone is in catalytic spiritual growth opportunities offered by the church, the more they typically grow in their love for Christ, their love for others, and in their spiritual maturity. The Church Engagement percentile is determined by three factors, Catalytic Spiritual Catalysts, Church Activities, and Church Growth Environment.

As stated earlier, the Spiritual Vitality Index for Bridges Church for 2019 indicated that the church was above average in Faith in Action and Personal Spiritual Practices, but only average in the role of the church in the spiritual life of the congregants. Church Engagement would reveal to what extent people were beginning to see the church in a new light, participate in a greater way in growth activities, and develop a greater appreciation for the church in recognition of changes brought about through the intervention year.



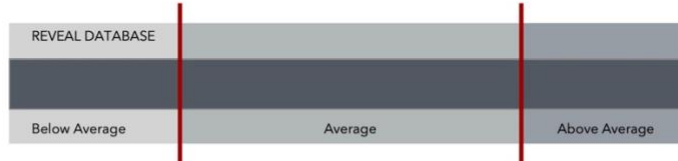
Bridges Church

- Understanding Your Report
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Church Engagement: Overall Engagement Score

By God's design, engagement in a local church brings growth in maturity marked by an increased love of God, love of others, and even of ourselves. The Church Engagement Scale assesses the extent to which the congregants at your church are committed to following Christ at your church and are involved in the opportunities for growth that your church provides. The CES also is available as a stand-alone survey that takes less than 5 minutes to complete. It can be deployed as a quick pulse-check on the ways your church is changing between years in which your church takes the full REVEAL for Church Survey.

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Ranking in the ninety-ninth percentile of all churches in the REVEAL for Churches database in the area of Church Engagement, Bridges Church demonstrated a growing healthy church culture where congregants not only participated in growth opportunities but found them helpful in their personal growth.

In the three subcategories making up Church Engagement, Catalytic Spiritual Practices, Church Activities, and Church Growth Environment, Brides Church ranked in the ninety-sixth, ninety-eight and ninety-fourth percentiles respectively. The respondents were participating in such activities as Bible studies, serving others both inside and outside the church, worship services, and small groups, and overall saw the church as a positive environment that fostered a growing love for Christ and others, while experiencing a growing spiritual maturity through church life.



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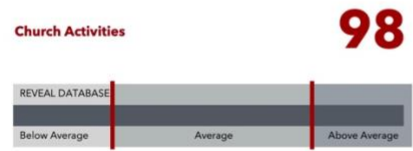
Church Engagement: The Three Keys

A closer look at the three key areas of engagement offers a deeper dive into the details that produced your church's overall engagement score.



Catalytic Spiritual Practices

These practices include Bible study, relating to God personally in prayer, giving time to serve others, financial giving, and living a life characterized by God's peace. REVEAL research has shown these areas to be Below Average Average Above Average catalytic to spiritual growth.



Church Activities

Based on input from pastors around the country, the Church Engagement Score focuses on frequency of involvement in three church activities: worship service attendance, small group involvement, and serving in a church ministry.



Church Growth Environment

Leaning into the REVEAL Best Practice Principles, the Church Engagement Score measures congregants' satisfaction with the church's environment for spiritual growth in the areas of creating ownership and helping people get moving on their growth journeys.

Vibrant Growth

While the REVEAL for Churches measures a church's growth in spiritual vibrancy, specifically in the Spiritual Vitality Index and in the Church Archetype metrics, there is another metric to consider when measuring vibrant growth and that is numerical growth. In the book of Acts, the numerical growth of the early Christian movement was recorded frequently, whether it was in the number of converts on Pentecost, or the daily growth of the church written about in Acts 2:47 or the five thousand male converts recorded in Acts 4:4. Often, vibrant spiritual growth results in numerical growth. Would Bridges Church experience numerical growth as a result of the intervention year, especially near the end of the year after the cumulative effects of the interventions? Would the church begin to see the type of growth she experienced in the first four years of her life or would the attendance continue to remain stagnant or even decline? How would the Covid-19 pandemic affect attendance?

From the earliest days of Bridges Church, the leadership made the decision to consider total attendance as the total number of people who physically attend a worship service from babies to adults with special attention given to avoid counting individual people more than once in the two services. These metrics would help the church leaders better ascertain growth from one year to the next as a gauge to help determine the health of the church. Church attendance over time can be an indicator of trends in spiritual health, and while it is only one metric to consider, it is an important metric in helping to determine missional effectiveness.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting restrictions on in-person gatherings would make direct comparisons difficult from year to year, beginning in March 2020, but yet there are some important conclusions that can be drawn through looking at attendance in different ways and time frames. In January and February 2020, before having to go to an online-only format, Bridges Church recorded an average weekly attendance of one hundred fourteen people, compared to an average attendance of ninety-seven in the corresponding months in 2019, a growth of eighteen percent. The average attendance in the first two months of 2020 also represented a growth of three-point six percent compared to the average attendance for the entire year in 2019, one hundred fourteen to one hundred ten. Bridges Church demonstrated a continual growth in attendance for the entire year of intervention, as the average attendance in 2018 was one hundred six, compared to the one hundred ten for the entire 2019 year.

With the move to online worship, a new way to measure attendance was needed. As recounted in Chapter 3 of this work, the leadership of Bridges decided to count weekly worship service attendance based on the metrics provided by Facebook Live, specifically the average of the highest and lowest number of viewers recorded in the Peak Live Viewers category, which was checked against the Total Minutes Viewed category and the average number of people

watching per device determined to be two point one, based on a sampling of thirty families and individuals known to be attending online. Using these metrics, an approximate weekly online attendance could be determined.

For the months of March and April 2020, the last two months of the intervention year, attendance at Bridges averaged one hundred fifty-eight, all online, an increase of forty-five percent. Like many churches across the country, this increased attendance could be attributed to the uncertainty people were experiencing due to the pandemic and their need for assurance and spiritual encouragement. Regardless of the reason, Bridges Church was experiencing numerical growth through the use of the new pathway of reaching people through the internet. When combining the first four months of 2020 and comparing them to the corresponding months of 2019, the resulting growth was thirty-two percent, one hundred thirty-six in 2020 to one hundred three in 2019. Also, as reported in Chapter Three, people from around the world and across the country began to attend the online services weekly, including an individual in Sweden, one in the Newport News, VA. area, a family in New York City, a couple in Globe, AZ, and an individual in Orange County, CA. Each of these people were in relational proximity to someone at Bridges Church, with either a family or friendship connection. Relational proximity rather than geographical proximity became more important for them in choosing a faith community to join. This was an important discovery for Bridges Church through the pandemic and became part of the overall missional strategy of the church. The online experience and presence would take on a greater importance in moving forward in the future as part of the missional resurgence of the church.

From the intervention year, the resultant vibrant growth was apparent. In the Spiritual Vitality Index, Bridges Church moved up four percentile ranking points from one year to the

next, a significant improvement considering over one thousand churches are in the REVEAL database. The church continued to exhibit Vibrant Church Archetype characteristics, and moved forward in the shadow archetype category, from Self-Motivated to Energized. Attendance was up a significant amount in the last four months of the intervention year, an increase of forty-five percent. New opportunities for reaching people opened up through going to an online format, for now the church had a more global impact. The church still needed to improve on personal evangelism, especially in the area of having spiritual conversations with non-believers, but real progress had been made and a path for greater change was beginning to emerge for the future.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In March 2019, “A new study from Exponential by Lifeway Research found 6 in 10 Protestant churches are plateaued or declining in attendance and more than half saw fewer than 10 become new Christians in the past 12 months.”¹⁷⁶ This trend in plateaued and declining churches is a continuation of years of churches in the United States heading in that direction.

In 2016, the average weekly worship attendance at Bridges Church fell to ninety-seven, an almost forty percent drop from the highest average weekly attendance in 2011 and the lowest in the church’s existence. Morale was low, the people were growing tired of the weekly grind of setting up and tearing down that a mobile church experiences, and baptisms were leveling off. Following years of decline in attendance, morale and vitality, the church was at a crossroads. The leaders of Bridges Church came to the conclusion that something needed to change in order for the church to survive, and not only to strive but to thrive.

In the summer of 2018, a small group of people from the church began to gather weekly outside on a piece of property the church owned to study and discuss the book, *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World* by Paul E. Miller. As part of the study, the group began to pray together and seek God’s direction for the church. One of the main foci of their prayers was revitalization for the church, a move of the Holy Spirit to bring life to the church and to reach the surrounding community. At the end of the summer, the church held a prayer summit, led by Neil Wheeler of Waypoint Church Partners, to challenge the participants to a greater prayer life and dependance on God. From this meeting, a plan was put in place to pray for the church in a greater way, This plan, called 10-10-10, would involve having a small team meet each week before the Worship Services and pray for ten minutes with ten minutes for fellowship

¹⁷⁶ “Small, Struggling Congregations Fill US Church Landscape,” Lifeway Research, accessed, October 24, 2020, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2019/03/06/small-struggling-congregations-fill-u-s-church-landscape/>

and ten minutes to greet people as they entered the facility. This prayer group prayed over each chair set up for the services, over the stage area, the technology used for the service and over every aspect of the church, seeking God with a greater fervor. This simple act of prayer by a small group of people was perhaps the genesis of what began to transpire in the rebirth of Bridges Church. Within several months, the church began to experience real change. The Prayer Team grew in number as it began to recruit people from around the country to pray. Email was used to decentralize prayer, as people prayed wherever they were, whenever they had time. Fasting was incorporated into the prayer life of the church to begin the New Year and leading up to Easter. Attendance began to climb slowly. In February 2019, a church facility only two miles from the elementary school where Bridges was meeting came up for sale, and within one year of the prayer summit, Bridges Church was able to purchase the facility, her first permanent home. In the spring of 2019, the church took the first of two REVEAL for Churches surveys and then a year of interventions with the hope of finding vibrant growth.

In some ways, this journey toward greater vibrancy for Bridges Church began in 2015, when the Lead Pastor was in a class at Liberty University and heard a phrase that would reverberate for years to come. This phrase, a combination of two statements made by Jesus, was a catalyst to many of the changes that would come to the church over the years. The phrase was simply this, “I will build my church; you make disciples.” This simple statement took all the pressure off of church leaders to try to build a church. That is the work of Jesus Christ. He builds the church. The role of the church is to make disciples, followers of Jesus who have given their life to Him and are devoted to Him, developing in Him, and deployed by Him. Making vibrant disciples of Jesus Christ is the pathway toward greater vibrancy as a church, as a church is simply the gathering of followers of Jesus. They are the “called out ones.” A vibrant church is

then, simply made up of vibrant followers of Jesus who love God and love others, growing in Christ and moving toward making Him the center of their life. Spiritual vibrancy is modeled by vibrant leaders and then entrusted to those who are faithful through discipleship.

The REVEAL for Churches Survey is designed to help churches discern the extent of their spiritual vitality or lack thereof and to suggest possible interventions to move the church to greater vitality. This Doctor of Ministry study is reliant on the research and resultant findings of the REVEAL for Churches work over of the years, specifically in the area of leading people to greater spiritual vitality, resulting in vibrant churches. The purpose of this Doctor of Ministry study is to discover effective pathways for the people of Bridges Church to become more spiritually vibrant with more love for God and others, and to be on mission to share that love of God with the community around them. The results of the follow-up survey in 2020 and the year of interventions bear out the effectiveness of the project and the fulfillment of its purpose.

The Comparison of the Results

Overall, the results of this study were very favorable. The REVEAL for Churches survey are reported in percentile rankings, making comparisons to others in the study relatively straightforward. In the most important categories, the Spiritual Vitality Index and the Church Archetype, Bridges Church did very well, being grouped in the top one percent of all churches in spiritual vitality and as a Vibrant Church, in the top eight percent of all churches, with over one thousand six hundred seventy-five churches in the database. People are growing in their love of God and of others, church satisfaction is very high, and people are serving both inside and outside the church. As reported in Chapter 4, Bridges Church had relatively high scores in all categories.

Lessons Learned

Through this research, a great deal was learned about leading a church to greater vitality, specifically one that had experienced years of decline and in need of missional resurgence. These insights could be very useful to other churches who are also in need of similar revitalization. The following are just some of the lessons learned in going through this process.

1. It is God who brings life to the church. Jesus Christ is the head of the church, and the church belongs to Him. He partners with human beings in accomplishing the work, but it is through the power of the Holy Spirit that the life of a church is renewed, and the mission restored. Zechariah 4:6 is a great reminder of the true source of success for any endeavor: “‘Not by strength or by might, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of Hosts.” (Zech 4:6 HCSB)
2. Prayer is the key to prepare hearts for revitalization. The very first step in any revitalization project is prayer, first by the leader and then by others, followed by a mobilization of the church to pray. Prayer prepares hearts for the work of God.
3. Keep the focus on helping people grow in their love for God and for others, both inside and outside the church. The Great Commandment is the “measuring stick” of true vitality as people move into a right relationship with God and others. REVEAL for Churches is centered on this concept, and their resulting survey was developed to measure both an individual’s and a church’s love in these two categories, love for God and love for others.
4. Taking one year to intentionally focus on one specific area of church growth is a powerful and effective way to truly change a church and her culture. There is something powerful about aligning all the rhythms and activities of a church in one direction in one year. That length of time is enough to see lasting results but not too long that people lose

interest or enthusiasm. Each year, the church could focus on a different area of growth and align the worship services, small groups, programs and activities to address that area, keeping the vision for change constantly in front of the people. The year could even be broken down into subsets, a quarter of a year at a time, all heading in the same direction. This introduces the idea of constant change and improvement into the life of the church, helping to stave off the temptation to drift or grow complacent.

5. The Best Five Practices must constantly and consistently be communicated and reinforced as part of the life of the church. The Five Best Practices, discovered by REVEAL for Churches, are five common practices in the lives of the people in the most vibrant churches in their data base. They include 1) Get People Moving by providing a clear discipleship pathway 2) Embed the Bible in Everything by making the Word of God the very heart of the church 3) Create Ownership by developing leaders through a small group system 4). Pastor the Local Community by serving outside the church and making the community the “mission field” 5) Demonstrate Christ-Centered Leadership by surrendering the church decision-making process to Christ. These five practices must become part of the life of the church and not side issues. The church must be vigilant in pursuing these objectives.
6. Keep the missional vision alive. More than a yearly objective, the missional vision is the life of the church, fulfilling God’s deep love for people and reconciling them to Himself. Once the missional vision is lost, it is easy for a church to become insular and inward focused, and it is difficult to restore the heart of a church that becomes consumeristic in nature. The church must always be about the work of the Father. Losing that, means losing the life of the church. God is looking for those willing to be on mission with Him

in seeking and saving the lost, and He pours life in the church that desires to go with Him.

7. Methods change but principles do not. One of the key lessons many churches are learning through the Covid-19 pandemic is to be flexible with methods. Innovation is key. The mission has not changed, but the church must learn new ways to connect with people. Disciple making has always been based on relationships built on encouragement and accountability, engaging the Word of God, prayer, and the work of the Holy Spirit, and that will not change, but the ways human beings connect in relationships is changing. Churches who want to engage the culture must continue to adapt to changing conditions, whether it be through online worship services, new discipleship applications, zoom groups or something not even invented yet. As change comes more and more rapidly, the church must hold methods loosely while holding tightly to timeless principles.
8. Revitalization can be a long process requiring patience and endurance. Most churches take years to fall into decline, and the climb out may take years. At best, revitalization is a three to five-year process with years of continual reinforcement following. No two churches are the same, and there are many variables to consider for deciding on a course of action to take to experience revitalization. The process cannot be rushed. Leaders who choose to undergo this journey must be ready to endure hardships, overcome obstacles and opposition, and be worn down by the process. It is not easy. However, God uses the revitalization process to not only bring life to a church but also to the life of the leader.
9. You must be willing to take a hard look at your church. One of the key axioms of the REVEAL for Churches study is “facts are your friends.” Until the leadership of the church is willing to take a deep, hard look at the real spiritual condition of their church,

real change is impossible. Things on the outside may look good. Attendance may be higher than ever, the offerings the best they have ever been, and people may be actively involved, but unless people are truly following Jesus, fully devoted, growing and surrendered to Him, the church is not be truly healthy. Just like a doctor needs to do full, regular examinations on a patient to fully determine their degree of health, a church must be willing to routinely look at their systems, processes and methods of disciple making to determine their vibrancy.

10. It takes the full local faith community to experience full revitalization. The cliché, “It takes team work to make the dream work,” has some merit. Church revitalization is a church-wide impact and requires a church-wide effort. The church leaders must involve everyone in the process to see real results. Revitalization is not the same as remodeling or renovating a restaurant or other business, which is mostly the addition of new paint, fixtures, training and possibly new staff. Church revitalization is a work of the heart, and in effect is the revitalization of many hearts. It is a return to the first love of each and every congregant and new life in Christ. It requires real and genuine leadership, the modeling of what it means to follow Jesus, humility and above all else, love.

The Results in Other Settings

REVEAL for Churches is designed to be implemented in churches of varying sizes, denominations, histories and contexts in both the United States and Canada. While not every church will experience the same results as Bridges Church, the process of self-examination through the REVEAL for Churches survey is invaluable in understanding the true spiritual state of a church and in helping to determine a new path forward toward greater effectiveness. From

its inception, REVEAL for Churches has continued to refine their methodology and reporting as they have gained new insights from surveyed churches.¹⁷⁷

Future Research

One of the more intriguing results from this study, is that after a year of interventions with a direct focus on sharing faith stories, Bridges Church experienced a thirteen percent decrease in the number of people who had six or more spiritual conversations with non-believers over the past six months. This decline is worth a closer examination to determine the cause of the decline. Were the methods of equipping the congregants ineffective? Did people feel less confident? Did the people become so comfortable with their relationships and experience within the church, they were unwilling to engage others outside the confines of the church? Were there other factors involved? Are there better, more effective methods such as servant evangelism that would have been a better “fit” for Bridges Church? In order to experience a deeper missional resurgence, the church will need to discover a better, more effective way to mobilize the congregants to be on mission in their daily lives.

Theological and Theoretical Framework

C.S. Lewis stated that, “The church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time.”¹⁷⁸ It has been stated that it’s not that the church has a mission, but that the mission has a church. The mission is to draw people into Christ, to develop a right relationship with God, one based on love, that is life and heart transforming, becoming like Christ in the process. That mission was in place before the creation of mankind,

¹⁷⁷ Parkinson and Scammacca-Lewis, RISE, 180-189.

¹⁷⁸ C.S. Lewis, *Strategic Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc, 1952), 69-170.

made necessary because of the fall of man and made possible through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

God is on mission to bring people back to Him. From the promise made to Abram that his descendants would be a blessing to the nations, to the Shema given to Moses to define a right relationship with God as being based on a complete love for Him, to the prophecies of the coming Messiah that would make this relationship possible, to the call to go to all nations with the Good News of this Messiah and to make disciples as stated in all four Gospels and the book of Acts, to the prescriptive and descriptive passages in the Epistles of the vibrant life of a follower of Jesus, to the fulfillment of the mission as depicted in the book of Revelation where people from every nation and tribe will be standing before the Lamb of God and welcomed into His rest in a perfect, unhindered relationship, the Scriptures all point to the all consuming passion of God to seek and save the lost in order to restore, redeem, and reconcile mankind.

Each church must discover within her own context her role in this mission of God. Every church must determine how she is called to make disciples where God has placed her. The church must answer what is a disciple and how to best develop them to become like Christ using language, methods and processes that are effective in that setting. If and when the church has lost her way and left the mission behind, she must stop, recognize this fact, and in partnership with God, return to the mission, experiencing revitalization and a missional resurgence as a result. Without this redirection, churches become lifeless and face death. The mission of God gives life to the church as she experiences the very heart of God.

According to REVEAL founders, Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, “The purpose of our churches – our commission, as church leaders – is to help people in our congregations to

become disciples who obey Jesus by loving God and loving others.”¹⁷⁹ Through the research conducted by REVEAL, they discovered that “Church activities do not produce spiritual growth.”¹⁸⁰ In other words, while church programs may bring comfort to some, provide an outlet for others, give people opportunities to build relationships, and give them a safe haven from the world, they do not necessarily fulfill God’s mission to make disciples and bring people into a right relationship with Him. They may be well intentioned and done with excellence. They may very well fill auditoriums with people and draw excitement, but they may not be developing hearts for God and others. Churches could hold very tightly to right doctrine, which is so very important, but may not be experiencing God in their daily, individual lives. The people may be experiencing deep relationships within their faith community but may not be seeking to bring others into their circle. They may not be building disciples who are ready to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth out of their great love for God and all He has done for them. They may not be able to withstand hardship or persecution because their spiritual roots have not gone down deeply into Christ. They may not even have a personal, right relationship with Christ themselves, but simply going about the traditions, programs and activities passed down to them. They may be missing out on the very thing God desires for them, a new, abundant life in Christ.

These discoveries have become the basis for the subsequent findings and interventions that have come from the REVEAL for Churches study. Missional resurgence and revitalization are two sides of the same coin. Life is found in being on mission with God, and the mission of God flows out of a right relationship with Him. They are inseparable. Bridges Church is moving toward greater life in Christ as she moves to a greater sense of mission. The results of the study

¹⁷⁹ Hawkins and Parkinson, *MOVE*, 12.

¹⁸⁰ Parkinson and Scammacca-Lewis, *RISE*, xi.

reveal a church that is growing in vitality and a greater love for God and for others, on mission with God in the world.

Recommendations

REVEAL for Churches recommends that churches space REVEAL for Churches surveys no sooner than eighteen months apart to measure church growth and intervention effectiveness. It would be the recommendation of this researcher that churches in search of revitalization take an initial REVEAL for Churches survey to determine benchmarks and to discern appropriate interventions. Then, over the next two years the church should develop a revitalization schedule and implement strategic interventions to move the church toward becoming a Vibrant Church in the continuum of church archetypes. At the end of the two years, the church should retake the REVEAL for Churches survey to ascertain growth and movement and to also determine and implement additional interventions. The survey should be taken a third time, at the end of this second round of interventions over an additional two years, to again see where the church is in moving toward revitalization and missional resurgence. Overall, this would require a four to five-year commitment in surveying the church three times with two, two-year intervention periods in between. Revitalization can be a long process, taking years to see real fruit, but the process is worthwhile if it means that the church could be restored to life and that lost people could be saved.

A second recommendation would be for churches to be in a constant revitalization mindset based on the Sigmoid Curve, beginning the process while the church is still in a period of numerical and spiritual growth, when momentum is high. It is much more difficult to pursue vibrancy when the church is experiencing decline and disease. Church leaders must know their

congregations, keep a finger on the pulse of the spiritual life of the congregants, and adjust accordingly.

A third recommendation would be to give constant attention to the five best practices as reported in the REVEAL for Churches study. If the church can continue to get people moving by having a clear and effective discipleship pathway, embed the Bible in everything the church does, create ownership to empower and equip the congregants and build leaders, pastor the local community and make it the mission field, and provide Christ-centered leadership, then she will maintain and build vibrancy for a longer period. Regular reflection upon and evaluation of the church's systems and practices will help keep the church on a healthy path, making revitalization an ongoing and constant tweaking rather than a complete overhaul.

Conclusions

Church revitalization is an ongoing process, continuous and continual. Because churches are a faith community of gathered individuals, church revitalization requires individual revitalization. To revitalize a church is to revitalize individuals, one heart at a time. As people come and go over time, and their hearts wax and wane, the church must be diligent to continue to lead the congregants toward greater maturity, making more and deeper disciples. To drift is to lose ground, vitality, and missional focus.

In so many ways, church revitalization and missional resurgence are tied together. A church on mission is a church with life. A church with life is always moving toward mission. Followers of Jesus follow Him into mission. They listen to His voice and join in the work He is doing. The Holy Spirit empowers the followers of Jesus to accomplish the work. The followers of Jesus are continually learning to follow Him unconditionally and fully, ready to sacrifice all

for Him. They are growing to be like Him. They go with Him. In Him, is life, new life, and vibrancy.

From this study, a new phrase developed. It is born out this research and experience of a church going through the REVEAL for Churches study and in need of revitalization. The phrase, *missional revitalization*, is the combination of missional resurgence and revitalization. It reflects what churches should constantly be seeking, working toward and focused on throughout the life of the church. Defined, *missional revitalization* is the life-giving, Holy Spirit empowered process of making more and deeper disciples, growing in and being transformed by their love for God and others by becoming devoted to, developing in, and deployed by Jesus. *Missional revitalization* is a synthesis of the Biblical, theoretical and theological understandings of the mission of God to give new life, a right relationship, and purpose to people.

There is a thread that runs throughout the Scriptures that reveals the heart of God. It is stated in the Levitical Law found in the Pentateuch, restated in the prophecies in Ezekiel after God's people had gone astray, and fulfilled in the visions of Revelation. It is a simple, but profound statement of what God desires in our relationship with Him. In Leviticus 26:12, Ezekiel 11:20, and Revelation 21:3, God states that we are to be His people, and He will be our God. That is what He desires. People from every tribe and nation in a right relationship with Him, He our God, we His people. Ultimately, this is what missional revitalization is all about, and what it seeks to create. History is moving in a direction to fulfill what God desires. Each and every church and each and every individual that make up these churches is invited to be on mission with Jesus to fulfill God's will and see His purposes come to fruition. There is no greater purpose to pursue, and churches that find and live out these purposes also find life in living out the mission with Christ as they experience missional revitalization.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

February 21, 2019

Patrick Norris

IRB Exemption 3690.022119: A Missional Resurgence: Helping Bridges Church to Rediscover Her Missional Purpose Resulting in Vibrant Growth

Dear Patrick Norris,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(3), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

(3)(i) Research involving benign behavioral interventions in conjunction with the collection of information from an adult subject through verbal or written responses (including data entry) or audiovisual recording if the subject prospectively agrees to the intervention and information collection and . . . the following criteria is met:

(A) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu

Sincerely,



G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

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APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT EMAIL

May 1, 2019

Dear Bridges Church Family,

As a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The purpose of my research is to help people grow to become more Christ centered and in the process help our church grow to be more vibrant, and I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are 18 years of age or older and are willing to participate, you will be asked to take an online survey through <https://revealforchurch.com>. It should take approximately twenty minutes for you to complete the survey. Your name and email address will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential by Reveal and will not be passed along to me as the researcher.

To participate click on the link provided through www.revealforchurch.com here... (it will be provided by www.revealforchurch.com at the time of the survey)

The consent document contains additional information about my research, but you do not need to sign and return it.

Thank you for your help in this project as we work together in our walk with Christ.

Sincerely,

Patrick Norris
Pastor Bridges Church

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM 2019

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
2/21/2019 to --
Protocol # 3690.022119

CONSENT FORM

*A Missional Resurgence: Helping Bridges Church to Rediscover Her Missional Purpose
Resulting in Vibrant Growth*

Patrick Norris
Liberty University
School of Divinity

You are invited to be in a research study to help our church discover how to best help people grow as followers of Jesus Christ. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a member of Bridges Church, and you are 18 or older. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Patrick Norris, a Doctor of Ministry candidate in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to discover and implement effective practices to help our church grow toward greater Christlikeness as individuals and toward greater vibrancy as a church.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following:

1. In the late spring of 2019, take an online survey through <https://revealforchurch.com>. This survey will take about twenty minutes to complete.
2. After the results are compiled, the church will identify and implement an intervention, a series of action steps to help the church grow toward greater vibrancy. The REVEAL study is designed to help churches identify possible interventions based on the results from the survey.
3. In the late spring of 2020, the church members will be asked to take the survey again to see what growth if any has occurred through the course of the year and the implementation of the interventions.

Risk: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study and participating in the identified and implemented interventions are being part of a church that desires to grow in their Christ centeredness as individuals and in vibrancy as a church as well as growing as an individual toward greater Christ centeredness

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

APPENDIX D: REVEAL FOR CHURCHES RESULTS 2019



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Understanding Your Report

Two Important Notes:

RISE Connection

Page numbers from the latest REVEAL book, *RISE: Bold Strategies to Transform Your Church*, will be referenced throughout your report for in-depth explanations of the topics being covered.

Color-Coding Comparisons

Your survey results are compared against 1500+ churches that have taken the survey since 2008. To help you understand the comparisons, a color-coded format is used:



Bridges Church's Demographics in Total and by Segment

Demographics	Total	Exploring Christ	Growing in Christ	Close to Christ	Christ-Centered
Base Size	68	3	22	26	17
Age 18-29	16%	0%	18%	19%	12%
Age 30-49	25%	67%	32%	23%	12%
Age 50+	59%	33%	50%	58%	76%
Diversity (Non White, including Hispanics)	7%	0%	5%	8%	12%
Children Under 18 at Home	24%	67%	27%	19%	18%
Education (% college degree or higher)	41%	0%	55%	35%	41%
Married	75%	67%	86%	69%	71%
Income Under \$30K	14%	33%	6%	13%	20%
Income \$30K - \$74,999	46%	67%	39%	39%	60%
Income Over \$75K	41%	0%	56%	48%	20%



Bottom 10% of Churches Bottom 25% of Churches Middle 50% of Churches Top 25% of Churches Top 10% of Churches

Database comparison is not available if sample size is less than 20.

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Bridges Church's Tenure in Total and by Segment

	Total	Exploring Christ	Growing in Christ	Close to Christ	Christ-Centered
Base Size	68	3	22	26	17
Less than one year	4%	0%	9%	4%	0%
One to five years	37%	0%	41%	46%	24%
Six to ten years	26%	100%	27%	15%	29%
Ten years or more	32%	0%	23%	35%	47%



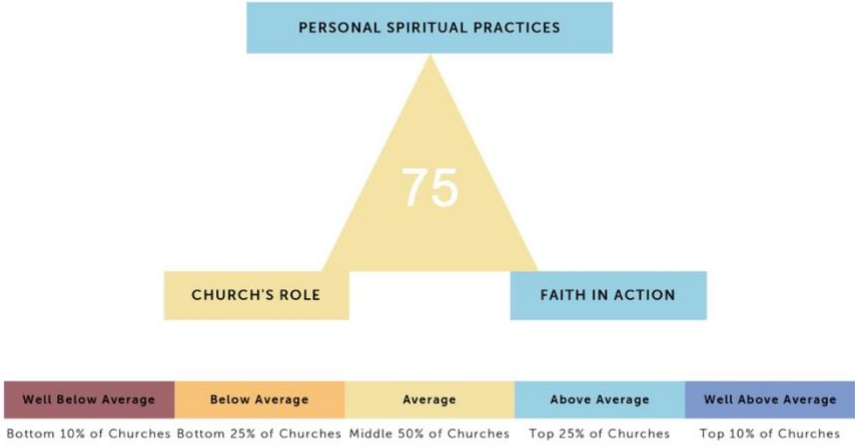
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Spiritual Vitality Index for Bridges Church



RISE connection: You can find a description of the Spiritual Vitality Index in Chapter 1, pages 6-8.

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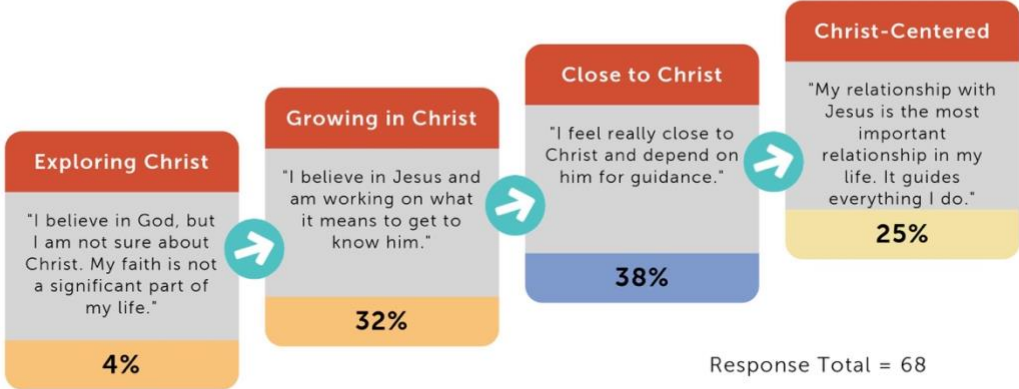
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Bridges Church's Spiritual Continuum



RISE connection: Chapter 1, pages 3-6, describes the four segments of the Spiritual Continuum.



Bridges Church's Spiritual Growth Catalysts



*Scale 0-100 Measures to What Extent Your Congregation Demonstrates These Spiritual Growth Catalysts

[RISE connection: Chapter 1, pages 3-6, describes these three core groups of spiritual catalysts.](#)



Bridges Church's Spiritual Beliefs in Total and by Segment

Key Spiritual Beliefs (% Who Very Strongly Agree)	Total	Exploring Christ	Growing in Christ	Close to Christ	Christ-Centered
Base Size	68	3	22	26	17
Salvation by Grace: I believe nothing I do or have done can earn my salvation.	79%	33%	73%	81%	94%
The Trinity: I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God-Father, Son and Holy Spirit.	93%	33%	95%	96%	94%
Authority of the Bible: I believe the Bible has decisive authority over what I say and do.	65%	33%	55%	69%	76%
Personal God: I believe God is actively involved in my life.	75%	0%	59%	85%	94%
Identity in Christ: I exist to know, love and serve God.	72%	0%	55%	85%	88%
Single-Mindedness: I desire Jesus to be first in my life.	54%	0%	27%	58%	94%
Eternity: I believe people who deliberately reject Jesus Christ as Savior will not be granted eternal life.	57%	0%	55%	62%	65%



Bottom 10% of Churches Bottom 25% of Churches Middle 50% of Churches Top 25% of Churches Top 10% of Churches

Database comparison is not available if sample size is less than 20.

Bridges Church's Spiritual Beliefs in Total and by Segment

Key Spiritual Beliefs (% Who Very Strongly Agree)	Total	Exploring Christ	Growing in Christ	Close to Christ	Christ-Centered
Base Size	68	3	22	26	17
Compassion: God calls me to be involved in the lives of the poor and suffering.	59%	0%	50%	58%	82%
Church: I believe I cannot grow as a Christian unless I am an active member of a local church.	37%	0%	36%	31%	53%
Humanity: I believe we are created in the image of God and therefore have equal value, regardless of race, religion, or gender.	78%	33%	68%	77%	100%
Stewardship: I believe a Christian should lead a sacrificial life that is not driven by the pursuit of material things.	56%	0%	41%	62%	76%



Bottom 10% of Churches Bottom 25% of Churches Middle 50% of Churches Top 25% of Churches Top 10% of Churches

Database comparison is not available if sample size is less than 20.

Bridges Church's Attitudes About Personal Spiritual Practices in Total and by Segment

Attitudes About Personal Spiritual Practices (% Who Very Strongly Agree)	Total	Exploring Christ	Growing in Christ	Close to Christ	Christ-Centered
Base Size	68	3	22	26	17
Worship: I thank God daily for who he is and what he is doing in my life.	47%	0%	27%	50%	76%
Prayer: I seek to grow closer to God by listening to him in prayer	31%	0%	9%	31%	65%
Bible Study: I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my life.	32%	0%	14%	31%	65%
Biblical Community: I allow other Christians to hold me accountable for my actions.	21%	0%	5%	23%	41%
Giving Away My Money: My first priority in spending money is to support God's work.	16%	0%	9%	15%	29%



Bottom 10% of Churches Bottom 25% of Churches Middle 50% of Churches Top 25% of Churches Top 10% of Churches

Database comparison is not available if sample size is less than 20.

Bridges Church's Personal Spiritual Practice Behaviors in Total and by Segment

Personal Spiritual Practice Behaviors	Total	Exploring Christ	Growing in Christ	Close to Christ	Christ-Centered
Base Size	68	3	22	26	17
Reflection on Scripture (Daily)	28%	0%	5%	31%	59%
Bible Reading (Daily)	29%	0%	5%	31%	65%
Prayer to Confess Sins (Daily)	43%	0%	36%	42%	59%
Prayer to Seek Guidance (Daily)	56%	0%	27%	65%	88%
Tithing (10% or More)	54%	0%	41%	58%	76%



Bottom 10% of Churches Bottom 25% of Churches Middle 50% of Churches Top 25% of Churches Top 10% of Churches

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Database comparison is not available if sample size is less than 20.

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Bridges Church's Faith-in-Action Attitudes in Total and by Segment

Faith-in-Action Attitudes (% Who Very Strongly Agree)	Total	Exploring Christ	Growing in Christ	Close to Christ	Christ-Centered
Base Size	68	3	22	26	17
Giving Away My Time: I give away my time to serve and help others in my community.	25%	33%	9%	23%	47%
Giving Away My Faith: I feel fully equipped to share my faith with people who do not attend church.	12%	0%	5%	19%	12%
Giving Away My Life: I am willing to risk everything that is important in my life for Jesus Christ.	26%	0%	5%	35%	47%
Spiritual Gifts: I know and use my spiritual gifts to fulfill God's purpose.	22%	33%	14%	27%	24%
Rapid Growth: I am in a season of rapid spiritual growth.	10%	0%	0%	15%	18%



Bottom 10% of Churches Bottom 25% of Churches Middle 50% of Churches Top 25% of Churches Top 10% of Churches

Database comparison is not available if sample size is less than 20.

Bridges Church's Faith-in-Action Behaviors in Total and by Segment

Faith-in-Action Behaviors	Total	Exploring Christ	Growing in Christ	Close to Christ	Christ-Centered
Base Size	68	3	22	26	17
Spiritual Friendships (Meet 1-2 Times a Month or More)	57%	33%	27%	62%	94%
Spiritual Mentors (Meet 1-2 Times a Month or More)	32%	0%	23%	35%	47%
Evangelism (6+ Spiritual Conversations with Non-Christians in the Last Year)	25%	0%	9%	35%	35%
Serving the Church (1-2 Times a Month or More)	81%	67%	77%	77%	94%
Serving Those in Need Through the Church (1-2 Times a Month or More)	49%	33%	36%	46%	71%
Serving Those in Need 'On My Own' (1-2 Times a Month or More)	34%	33%	23%	42%	35%



Bottom 10% of Churches Bottom 25% of Churches Middle 50% of Churches Top 25% of Churches Top 10% of Churches

Database comparison is not available if sample size is less than 20.

**Bridges Church's Spiritual Virtues
in Total and by Segment**

Spiritual Virtues (% Who Very Strongly Agree)	Total	Exploring Christ	Growing in Christ	Close to Christ	Christ-Centered
Base Size	68	3	22	26	17
Love: God's grace enables me to forgive people who have hurt me.	53%	33%	23%	65%	76%
Joy: I have inner contentment, even when things go wrong.	26%	0%	5%	31%	53%
Peace: I am not anxious about my life as I have an inner peace from God.	19%	0%	9%	27%	24%
Patience: I keep my composure, even when people or circumstances irritate me.	12%	0%	5%	19%	12%
Kindness: I am known as a person who speaks words of kindness to those in need of encouragement.	10%	0%	0%	19%	12%

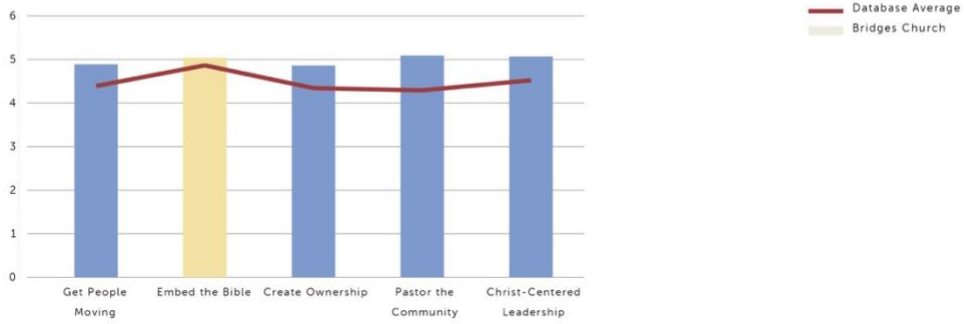
No normative comparisons are available for these items as this time.

**Bridges Church's Spiritual Virtues
in Total and by Segment**

Spiritual Virtues (% Who Very Strongly Agree)	Total	Exploring Christ	Growing in Christ	Close to Christ	Christ-Centered
Base Size	68	3	22	26	17
Faithfulness: I take unpopular stands when my faith dictates.	13%	0%	5%	15%	24%
Gentleness: I am known for not raising my voice.	16%	0%	14%	19%	18%
Self-Control: I control my tongue.	6%	0%	0%	12%	6%
Hope: When I am in a crisis, I find hope in my faith in God.	46%	0%	18%	58%	71%
Humility: No task is too menial, if God calls me to it.	54%	33%	36%	62%	71%

No normative comparisons are available for these items as this time.

Bridges Church's "Best Practices"



RISE connection: Chapter 1, pages 6-8, describes these five Best Practices.



1=Disagree; 6=Very Strongly Agree

Does Bridges Church "Get People Moving"?
in Total and by Segment

Best Practice #1: "Get People Moving"	Total	Exploring Christ	Growing in Christ	Close to Christ	Christ-Centered
Base Size	68	3	22	26	17
Encourages me to take personal responsibility for my spiritual growth	4.93	5.33	5.00	4.85	4.88
Church leaders model and consistently reinforce how to grow spiritually	4.96	5.00	5.05	4.81	5.06
Challenges me to grow and take next steps spiritually	4.88	5.00	5.00	4.62	5.12
Provides a clear pathway that helps guide my spiritual growth	4.79	4.67	4.86	4.73	4.82



Bottom 10% of Churches Bottom 25% of Churches Middle 50% of Churches Top 25% of Churches Top 10% of Churches

1=Disagree; 6=Very Strongly Agree

Database comparison is not available if sample size is less than 20.

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Does Bridges Church "Embed the Bible"?
in Total and by Segment

Best Practice #2: "Embeds the Bible in Everything"	Total	Exploring Christ	Growing in Christ	Close to Christ	Christ-Centered
Base Size	68	3	22	26	17
Helps me understand the Bible in greater depth	4.88	4.33	4.86	4.73	5.24
Church teachers provide sound doctrine rooted in biblical accuracy	5.19	6.00	4.91	5.15	5.47
Helps me develop a prayer life that connects me with God regularly	4.78	4.00	4.55	4.69	5.35
Provides a worship service that is challenging and thought-provoking	5.06	5.67	4.95	5.00	5.18
* Consistently challenges me to engage with Scripture in new and interesting ways	4.74	4.33	4.64	4.62	5.12



Bottom 10% of Churches Bottom 25% of Churches Middle 50% of Churches Top 25% of Churches Top 10% of Churches

1=Disagree; 6=Very Strongly Agree.
 Database comparison is not available if sample size is less than 20.
 *No normative comparison is available for this item as this time.

Does Bridges Church "Create Ownership" in Total and by Segment

Best Practice #3: "Creates Ownership"	Total	Exploring Christ	Growing in Christ	Close to Christ	Christ-Centered
Base Size	68	3	22	26	17
Helps me develop relationships that encourage accountability	4.37	3.33	4.36	4.38	4.53
Helps me feel like I belong	5.15	4.67	5.18	5.08	5.29
Provides opportunities to grow spiritually through relationships with others	5.00	5.00	4.95	4.81	5.35
Sets clear expectations for what it means to be part of the church	4.79	5.00	4.77	4.65	5.00
Inspires such a sense of ownership that the church becomes an important part of who I am	4.91	4.67	4.82	4.92	5.06

Well Below Average	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Well Above Average
Bottom 10% of Churches	Bottom 25% of Churches	Middle 50% of Churches	Top 25% of Churches	Top 10% of Churches

Does Bridges Church "Pastor the Community" and Demonstrate "Christ-Centered Leadership"? in Total and by Segment

Best Practice #4: "Pastor the Community"	Total	Exploring Christ	Growing in Christ	Close to Christ	Christ-Centered
Empowers me to go out "on my own" to make a significant impact on the lives of others	4.78	4.67	4.77	4.62	5.06
Promotes a strong serving culture recognized by the local community	5.31	6.00	5.45	5.12	5.29
Provides opportunities for me to serve those in need	5.19	6.00	5.23	5.04	5.24

Best Practice #5: "Christ-Centered Leadership"	Total	Exploring Christ	Growing in Christ	Close to Christ	Christ-Centered
Helps me develop a relationship with Jesus Christ	5.04	5.33	5.18	4.88	5.06
Church leaders maintain harmony, handle troublemakers, avert or resolve problems	5.10	5.33	5.18	4.92	5.24



Bottom 10% of Churches Bottom 25% of Churches Middle 50% of Churches Top 25% of Churches Top 10% of Churches

1=Disagree; 6=Very Strongly Agree. Database comparison is not available if sample size is less than 20.

Bridges Church's Church Activities: Participation and Satisfaction in Total and by Segment

Weekend Services	Total	Exploring Christ	Growing in Christ	Close to Christ	Christ-Centered
Base Size	68	3	22	26	17
Participation (3 or 4 Times Per Month)	91%	100%	91%	85%	100%
Satisfaction (% Extremely or Very Satisfied)	78%	100%	77%	77%	76%

Small Groups	Total	Exploring Christ	Growing in Christ	Close to Christ	Christ-Centered
Participation (1-2 Times Per Month or More)	78%	67%	73%	77%	88%
Satisfaction (% Extremely or Very Satisfied)	59%	50%	69%	52%	60%



Bottom 10% of Churches Bottom 25% of Churches Middle 50% of Churches Top 25% of Churches Top 10% of Churches

Database comparison is not available if sample size is less than 20.

Bridges Church's Overall Satisfaction & Barriers to Growth in Total and by Segment

	Total	Exploring Christ	Growing in Christ	Close to Christ	Christ-Centered
Base Size	68	3	22	26	17
Overall Satisfaction with the Church's Role in Spiritual Growth (% Extremely or Very Satisfied)	63%	33%	64%	65%	65%
Satisfaction with the Senior Pastor's Effectiveness (% Extremely or Very Satisfied)	96%	100%	95%	92%	100%

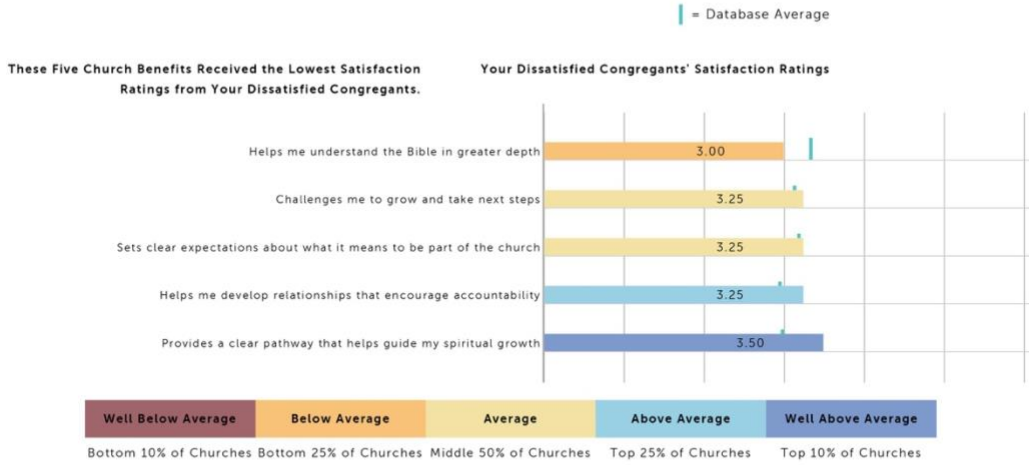
	Total	Exploring Christ	Growing in Christ	Close to Christ	Christ-Centered
Dissatisfaction with the Church's Role in Spiritual Growth (% Dissatisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied, or Somewhat Satisfied)	6%	0%	5%	12%	0%
Percentage Who Say They Are Spiritually Stalled	6%	33%	9%	4%	0%
Percentage Who Are "Unsure, Probably or Definitely" Leaving the Church	3%	0%	5%	4%	0%



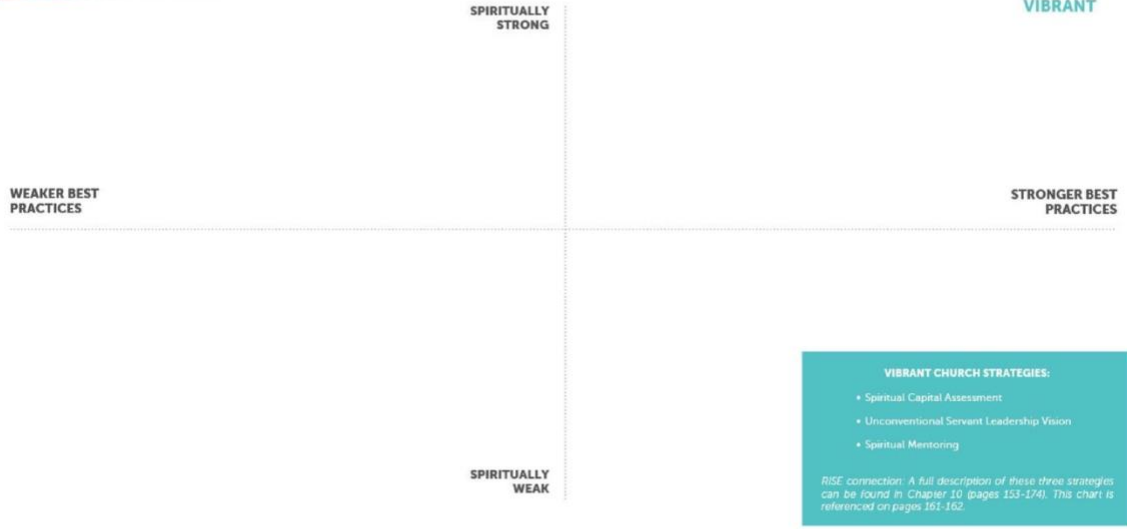
Bottom 10% of Churches Bottom 25% of Churches Middle 50% of Churches Top 25% of Churches Top 10% of Churches

Database comparison is not available if sample size is less than 20.

These Five Benefits Received the Lowest Satisfaction Ratings from Your Dissatisfied Congregants.



Next Steps for the Vibrant Church



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Finish

REVEAL
FOR CHURCH

spiritual life survey

**REVEAL Survey
Comprehensive Report**

Bridges Church
April 28, 2019

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APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM 2020

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
2/21/2019 to --
Protocol # 3690.022119

CONSENT FORM

*A Missional Resurgence: Helping Bridges Church to Rediscover Her Missional Purpose
Resulting in Vibrant Growth*

Patrick Norris
Liberty University
School of Divinity

You are invited to be in a research study to help our church discover how to best help people grow as followers of Jesus Christ. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a member of Bridges Church, and you are 18 or older. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Patrick Norris, a Doctor of Ministry candidate in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to discover and implement effective practices to help our church grow toward greater Christlikeness as individuals and toward greater vibrancy as a church.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following:

1. In the late spring of 2020, take an online survey through <https://revealforchurch.com>. This survey will take about twenty minutes to complete.
2. In the spring of 2019, the church took the same survey and the results were compiled, an intervention, a series of action steps, was identified and implemented, and now we will be taking this survey a second time to see what changes, if any have occurred over the past year.
3. The results from this survey will be used to help us continue to grow in vibrancy as a church and for each member to grow to greater Christ centeredness in their lives in the years to come.

Risk: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study and participating in the identified and implemented interventions are being part of a church that desires to grow in their Christ centeredness as individuals and in vibrancy as a church as well as growing as an individual toward greater Christ centeredness

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

APPENDIX F: REVEAL FOR CHURCHES RESULTS 2020



REVEAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

Bridges Church

May 2020

68 Participants



Bridges Church

Understanding Your Report

Spiritual Vitality Index

Church Archetypes

Spiritual Continuum

Spiritual Growth Catalysts

Best Practices

Church Activities

Church Satisfaction

Church Engagement

Welcome to your REVEAL report. The report leans into findings from fifteen years of research on how to increase church effectiveness in promoting spiritual growth. It was developed using data from over 2,300 churches and more than 500,000 congregants. This database allows REVEAL to provide you with unique insights about your church's spiritual vitality by comparing your results to those of a diverse group of churches representing many denominations, sizes, styles and geography.

REVEAL provides two signature measures of spiritual vitality, which are the Spiritual Vitality Index and the Church Archetype. The rest of the report drills down into the Spiritual Growth Catalysts and the five Best Practices that support those results.

Understanding Your Report Page 3

This section explains how to understand the metrics used to interpret your report findings. It also provides your demographic and church tenure profiles plus your response rate

Five Best Practices Page 16

This section shares the congregation's perspective on the church's effectiveness against five Best Practices: Get People Moving, Embed the Bible in Everything, Create Ownership, Pastor the Local Community and Christ-Centered Leadership.

Spiritual Vitality Index Page 6

The SVI is an aggregate measure of a congregation's spiritual maturity and a church's discipleship effectiveness.

Church Activities Page 22

This section shows congregant participation in church activities: Weekend Services, Small Groups and Spiritual Community, Serving and Leading, and Generosity.

Church Archetypes Page 7

Every church falls into one of eight church archetypes representing a church's spiritual dynamics and discipleship culture.

Church Satisfaction Page 25

This section shows congregant satisfaction with church activities, overall satisfaction with the church's role in spiritual growth, and feedback on the role of the senior pastor.

Spiritual Continuum Page 9

This section shows a congregation's profile against three groups of spiritual catalysts: Beliefs, Personal Spiritual Practices and Faith in Action.

Church Engagement Page 29

This section provides feedback on the extent to which your congregants are committed to following Christ at your church and are involved in the opportunities for growth that your church provides.

Spiritual Growth Catalysts Page 11

This section shows a congregation's profile against three groups of spiritual catalysts: Beliefs, Personal Spiritual Practices and Faith in Action.



Bridges Church

Understanding Your Report

Spiritual Vitality Index

Church Archetypes

Spiritual Continuum

Spiritual Growth Catalysts

Best Practices

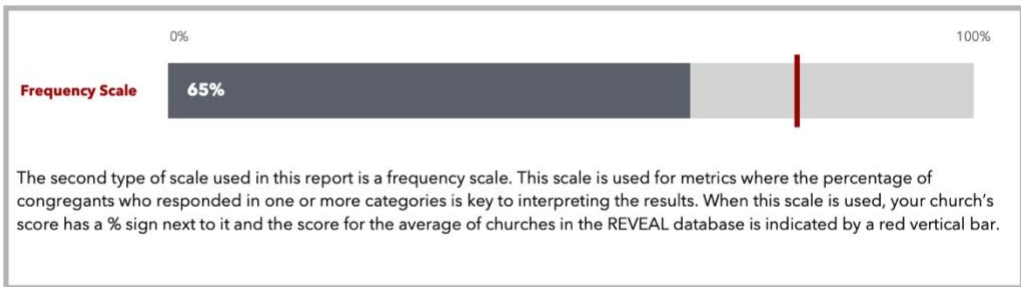
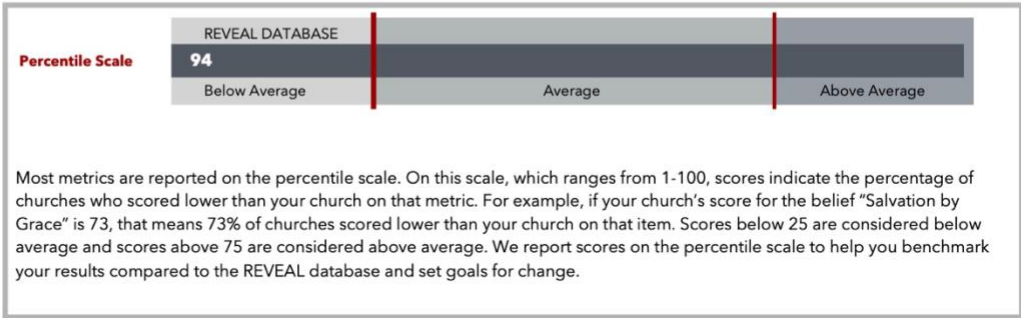
Church Activities

Church Satisfaction

Church Engagement

Understanding Your Report

Report Scales - There are two scales that are used in this report: the Percentile Scale and the Frequency Scale.





Bridges Church

Understanding Your Report

Spiritual Vitality Index

Church Archetypes

Spiritual Continuum

Spiritual Growth Catalysts

Best Practices

Church Activities

Church Satisfaction

Church Engagement

Understanding Your Report: Response Rate and Church Tenure

The response rate reflects the percentage of weekend adult attenders who participated in the survey. For churches with weekend adult attendance greater than 250, a 30% response rate represents sufficient participation for actionable findings. For churches with attendance below 250, a response rate greater than 50% is preferred.

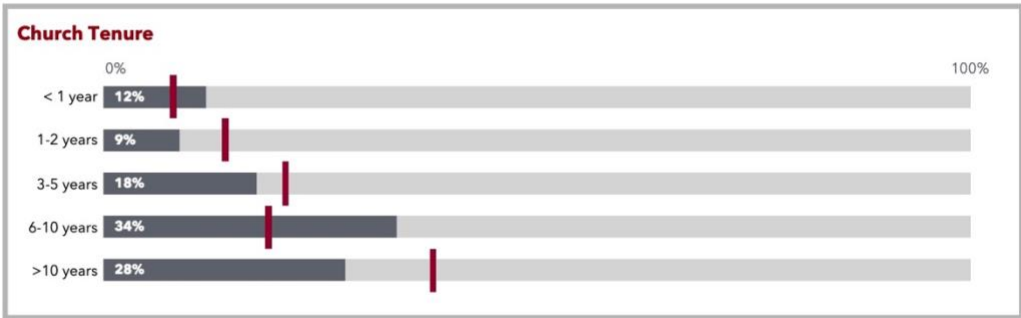
68

Participants

67%

of Congregation

Database Average





Bridges Church

Understanding Your Report

Spiritual Vitality Index

Church Archetypes

Spiritual Continuum

Spiritual Growth Catalysts

Best Practices

Church Activities

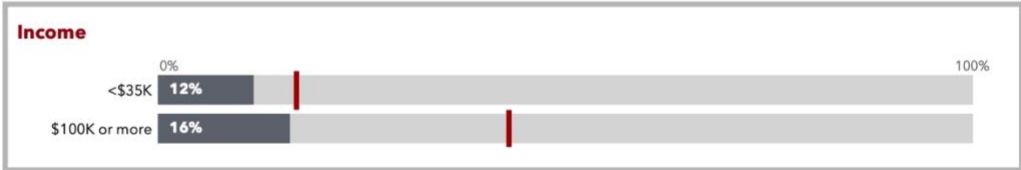
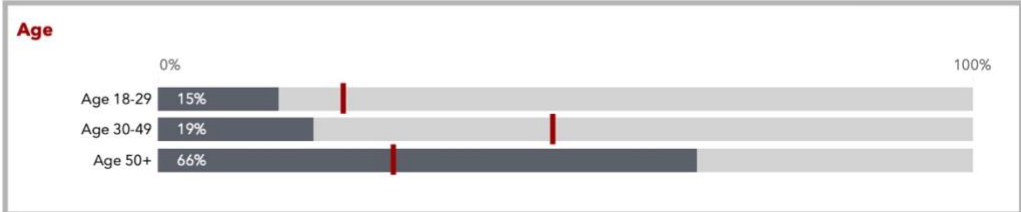
Church Satisfaction

Church Engagement

Understanding Your Report: Demographic Profile

This profile of demographics and church tenure is an important "check" for church leaders. If the information provided here closely mirrors the congregation you see at weekend services, you can feel confident that the survey results reflect your whole church family.

- Database Average



Important Note: Pastors frequently say that the percentage of young adults (ages 18-29) in their REVEAL demographic profile is lower than their weekend services percentage. If your results align with this trend, recognize that many REVEAL churches experience this same thing, which means our database average should be a reasonable comparative measure for your young adults.



Bridges Church

Understanding Your Report

Spiritual Vitality Index

Church Archetypes

Spiritual Continuum

Spiritual Growth Catalysts

Best Practices

Church Activities

Church Satisfaction

Church Engagement

Spiritual Vitality Index

The Spiritual Vitality Index is an aggregate measure of the spiritual maturity of a congregation and discipleship effectiveness of a church. The percentile score reflects how your church's results compare to the results of other churches in the REVEAL dataset. For example, a score of 65 means your result is higher than 65% of churches in the REVEAL dataset.

99



Church's Role 99	Personal Spiritual Practices 97	Faith in Action 91
<p>This measure reflects how a congregation feels about your church's effectiveness in three key areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps Me Develop a Personal Relationship with Christ • Helps Me Understand the Bible in Depth • Challenges Me to Grow and Take Next Steps 	<p>This measure reflects a congregation's ongoing interaction with God:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection on Scripture • Prayer to Seek Guidance • Financial Giving to the Church 	<p>This measure reflects the congregation's willingness to serve God:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evangelism • Serving Those in Need • Total Surrender to Christ



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Church Archetype

Your Church's Archetype is determined by plotting your results on the graph below. The vertical axis measures the spiritual strength of a congregation, using a mix of catalysts including beliefs, personal spiritual practices and faith in action. The horizontal measures the discipleship effectiveness of a church based on five Best Practices.



Primary Archetype

The primary archetype is the best descriptor for your church's characteristics based on your congregation's spiritual strength and how they evaluate your church on the Best Practices.

Vibrant

- Growing Attendance and Spirituality
- Sky-High Church Approval
- Challenge Marks the Culture
- 8% of REVEAL Churches



Shadow Archetype

The "shadow" archetype is the next best descriptor for your church's characteristics. It can indicate where the church is going (absent change) or where the church has been.

Energized

- "Buzz" of Spiritual Energy
- Faith Somewhat Church-centered
- Happy with the Church
- 12% of REVEAL Churches



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Spiritual Continuum

The Spiritual Continuum groups congregants based on the self-described closeness of their relationship with Jesus Christ. The hallmark finding of REVEAL is that this Continuum is highly predictive of the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that are associated with increased love of God. The statement under each bar is characteristic of the way in which people in that segment describe their faith in Christ.

Christ Centered - 28%



"My relationship with Jesus is the most important relationship in my life. It guides everything I do."

Close to Christ - 26%



"I feel really close to Christ and depend on him for guidance."

Growing in Christ - 41%



"I believe in Jesus and am working on what it means to get to know him."

Exploring Christ - 4%



"I believe in God, but I am not sure about Christ. My faith is not a significant part of my life."



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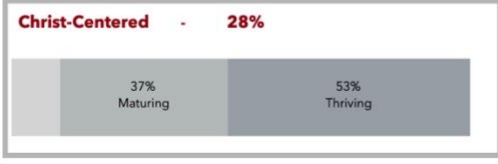
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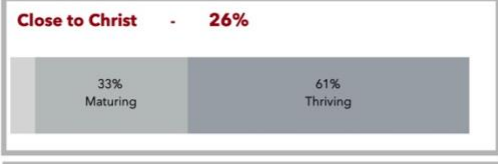
Spiritual Continuum and Love of Others

The Spiritual Continuum on page 9 is highly predictive of increasing spiritual beliefs, attitudes and behaviors. However, REVEAL findings also show that people who are very devoted to God are not always as devoted to others. The opposite can also be true: people who are very devoted to loving and serving others may not be equally devoted to God. The purpose of this graph is to provide a richer understanding of how "Love of Others" intersects with the Spiritual Continuum.



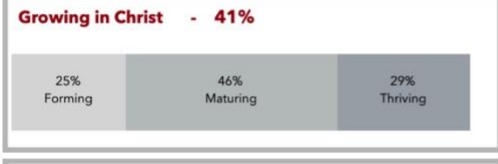
Thriving

Thriving Christ-followers show evidence of remarkable heart change as the fruit of the spirit—including love, peace, joy and patience—guide daily decisions. They're willing to put others first, regardless of who they are, and they seek meaningful friendships with other believers. They have a servant's heart—for the church as well as those in need—and they take advantage of opportunities to share their faith.



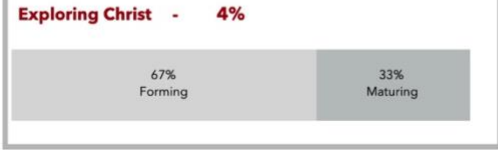
Maturing

Maturing Christ-followers demonstrate a growing love of others that's emerging as an active force in daily life. They're increasingly willing to put others first, and to tap into God's grace to help forgive people who cause them pain. They want to find Christian mentors to help them stay on track spiritually. However, they struggle at times to give away money and time sacrificially.



Forming

Christians in the earlier stages of faith formation experience a growing empathy for others, but they need a jumpstart to act on those feelings. They're willing to step up to the needs of the church and local community but find it to be a stretch to make a regular commitment. They also find sharing their faith with others uncomfortable.





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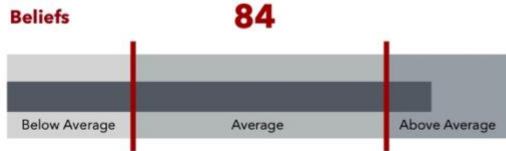
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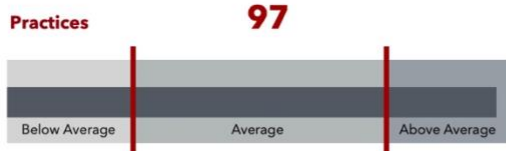
Church Engagement

Spiritual Growth Catalysts

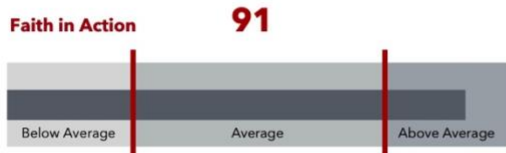
One of REVEAL's most significant discoveries was what helps people move along the Spiritual Continuum. Beliefs, Personal Spiritual Practices and Faith in Action advance spiritual growth at different stages of maturity, while the Virtues measure the fruit of spiritual growth.



Beliefs are critical in the early developmental stage of spiritual growth. The four core Christian beliefs measured are Salvation by Grace, the Trinity, Personal God, and Authority of the Bible.



Personal Spiritual Practices are critical as people develop their own relationship with Christ. The three Personal Spiritual Practices measured are Reflection on Scripture, Prayer to Seek Guidance, and Tithing.



Faith in Action catalysts are most influential in the later stages of maturity. The four Faith in Action measures are three behaviors—Evangelism, Serving Those in Need Through the Church, and Serving Those in Need on My Own—plus, an attitude of Total Surrender.



Virtues reflect the fruit that comes from abiding in Christ. The virtues measured include Love, Joy, Peace, Patience and Self-Control.



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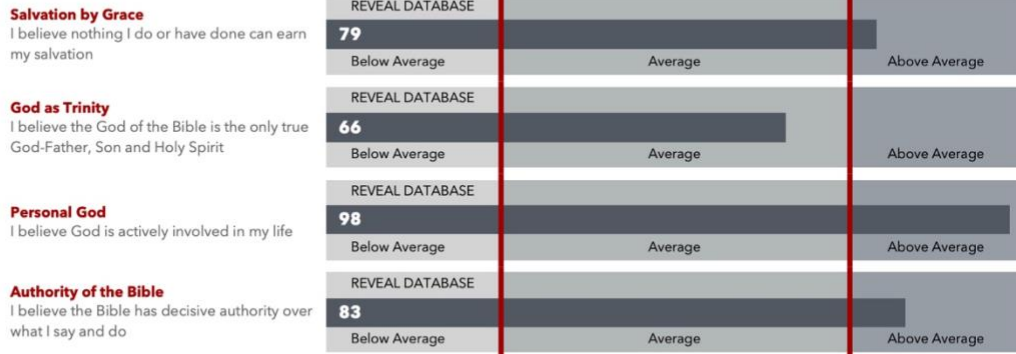
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Spiritual Growth Catalysts: Beliefs

Beliefs reflect what people accept as true or real. Because beliefs guide behavior, developing strongly held core Christian beliefs is a key aspect of spiritual growth. These four beliefs are key indicators of your people's progress in aligning their minds with the mind of Christ, an integral part of the process of becoming like Jesus in every way.





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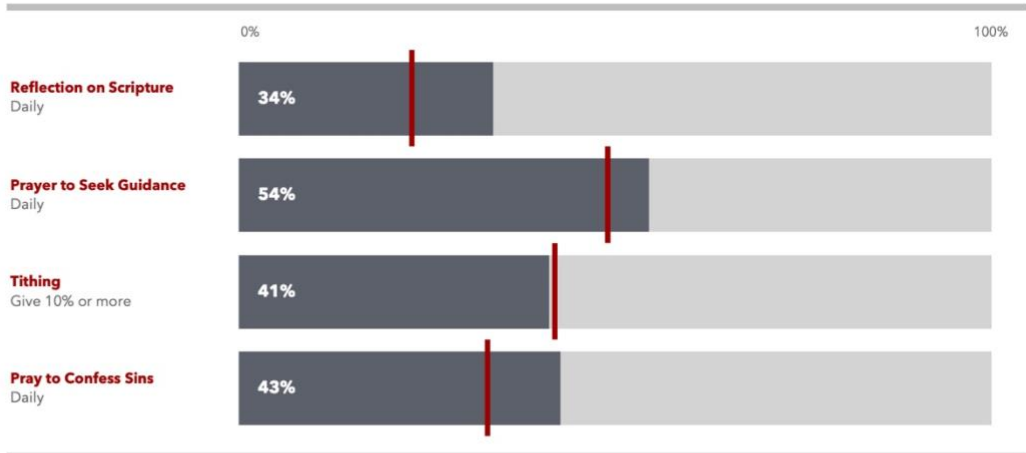
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Spiritual Growth Catalysts: Practices

Personal spiritual practices are very powerful catalysts. Consistent with the teaching of Scripture and the spiritual formation traditions of the church, REVEAL's research has confirmed the incredible impact of spiritual practices on the pace of spiritual growth. Increasing frequency of reflection on Scripture, in particular, is the most influential practice for every segment on the Spiritual Continuum.





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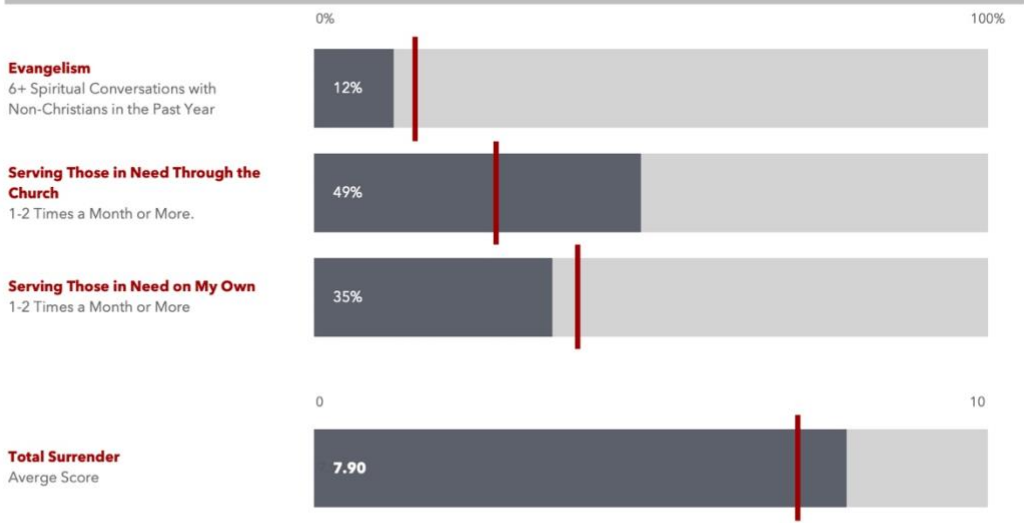
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Spiritual Growth Catalysts: Faith in Action

The power of this group of catalysts is in their relational dynamics. Because they involve interactions with others, they are more public expressions of faith that involve greater risk than private spiritual practices or activities held inside the church. In addition to the behavior of serving and evangelism, the attitude of "Total Surrender" is a critical indicator that measures your people's "willingness to risk everything" for Jesus.



*'Total Surrender' is a measure related to sacrifice; it reflects a congregation's willingness to 'risk everything that's important in my life for Jesus Christ.'



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Spiritual Growth Catalysts: Virtues

Virtues reflect the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22. They reflect maturity in spiritual development, providing evidence that your people are becoming more like Christ. REVEAL data show that the five virtues below are the most challenging for congregants to demonstrate consistently.

Love God's grace enables me to forgive people who have hurt me.	REVEAL DATABASE		
	91		
	Below Average	Average	Above Average
Joy I have inner contentment, even when things go wrong.	REVEAL DATABASE		
	100		
	Below Average	Average	Above Average
Peace I am not anxious about my life as I have an inner peace from God.	REVEAL DATABASE		
	100		
	Below Average	Average	Above Average
Patience I keep my composure, even when people or circumstances irritate me.	REVEAL DATABASE		
	100		
	Below Average	Average	Above Average
Self-Control I control my tongue.	REVEAL DATABASE		
	100		
	Below Average	Average	Above Average



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The Spiritual Vitality Index provided a unique opportunity to study the most effective disciple-making churches in the REVEAL database. The most remarkable characteristic of the churches in the study was their incredible diversity, ranging from a small church in the poorest zip code in Detroit to a Dallas megachurch with the highest tithing rate in the nation. But whether they were large or small, well-resourced or barely scraping by, REVEAL discovered they all pursued these five Best Practices.



It's very important not to view these results as a critique of your church. Consider them more like a child's request for help with homework. Becoming like Christ a difficult assignment, and your people are asking for more help from your church in some areas.



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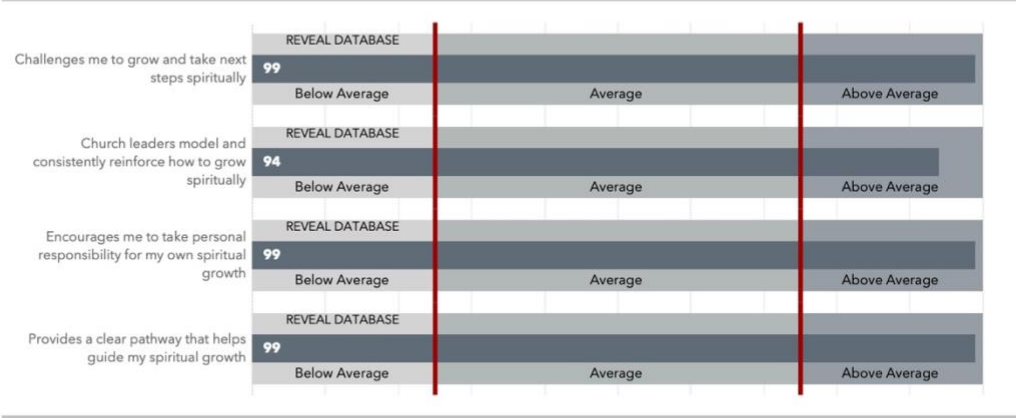
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Best Practices: Get People Moving

“Get People Moving” means giving newcomers clear next steps by offering a spiritual on-ramp, like an orientation program or the Alpha Course. Ideally, the senior pastor should cast the vision for this on-ramp and promote it as a top priority for the church.





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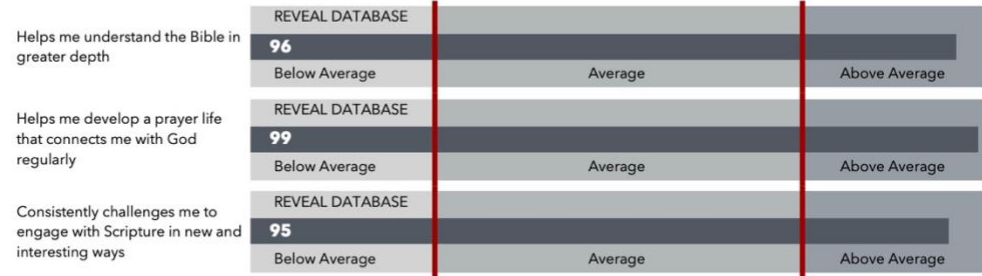
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Best Practices: Embed the Bible in Everything

“Embed the Bible in Everything” means making Scripture the heart of your church culture. Beyond making Scripture the centerpiece of the weekend message, bring wisdom from the Bible into all internal and external events. Also, take away the excuses people give for not engaging in the Bible by making Scripture practical, relevant and accessible—not just on Sunday, but throughout the week.





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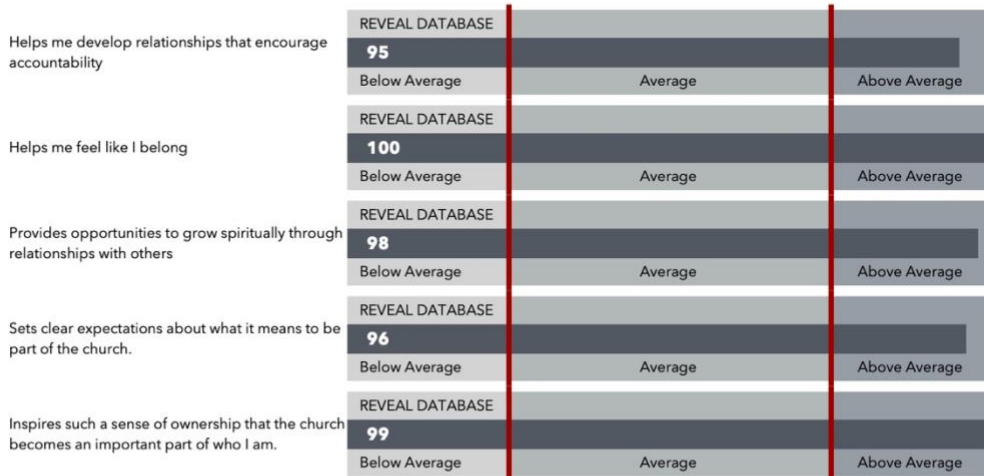
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Best Practices: Create Ownership

“Create Ownership” means helping people move from a passive, attendance-based relationship with the church to an active partnership. Invite them to “own” the vision of the church. Small groups are one key way to empower and equip them to carry the mission of the church into the world.





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Best Practices: Pastor the Local Community

"Pastor the Local Community" means rolling up your sleeves and working with area leaders and non-profits to identify and address the most pressing needs of your community. Set a high bar for your people by expecting them to serve the church as well as the needs of their neighbors.





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Best Practices: Christ-Centered Leadership

"Christ-Centered Leadership" means surrender all leadership dilemmas and decisions to Christ. It means to die to your own agenda and follow Jesus, modeling the surrendered life for your people. Humility and transparency are key.





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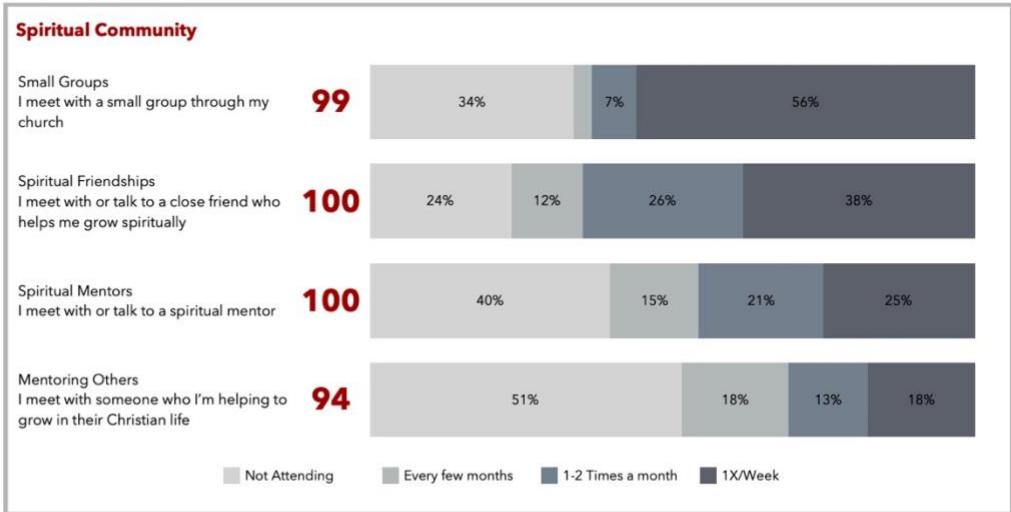
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Church Activities: Spiritual Community

Spiritual community shows up as a growth catalyst across the Spiritual Continuum, though the specific form of community shifts as people grow in their faith from more casual friendships to mentoring relationships.

The red numbers below show your church's percentile rank for participation in each type of spiritual community. The bar chart provides more detail on the frequency of participation at your church.





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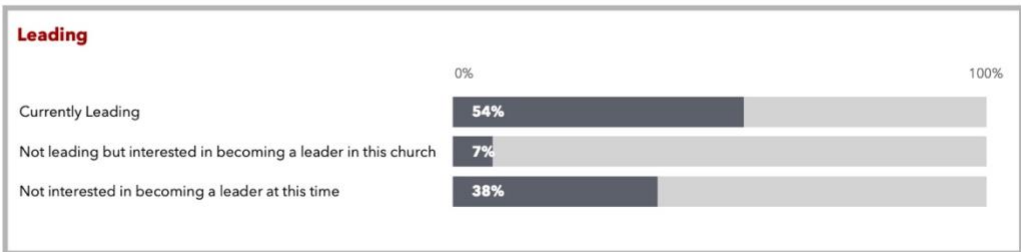
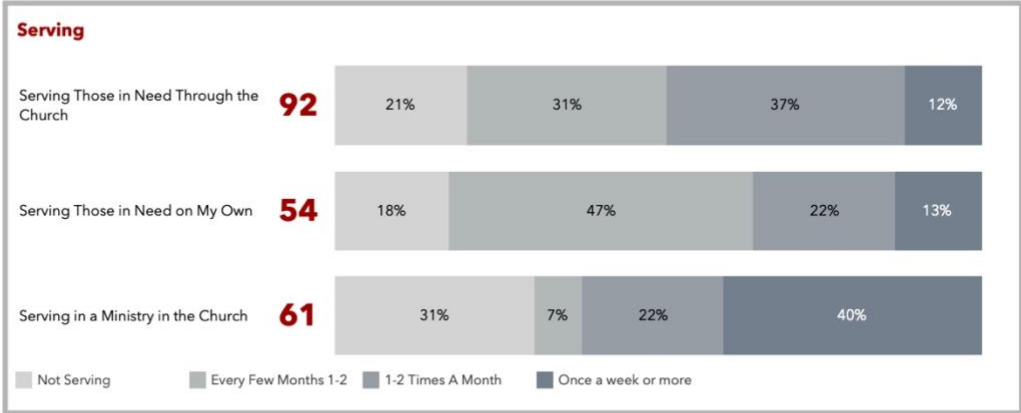
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Church Activities: Serving and Leading

Mobilizing volunteers and lay leaders is a pressing issue in any church. REVEAL findings also show that serving is the most catalytic church activity, particularly for more mature Christians. The combination of these two facts suggests nothing is more deserving of your time and resources than to identify and challenge the untapped potential and passion of your congregants.





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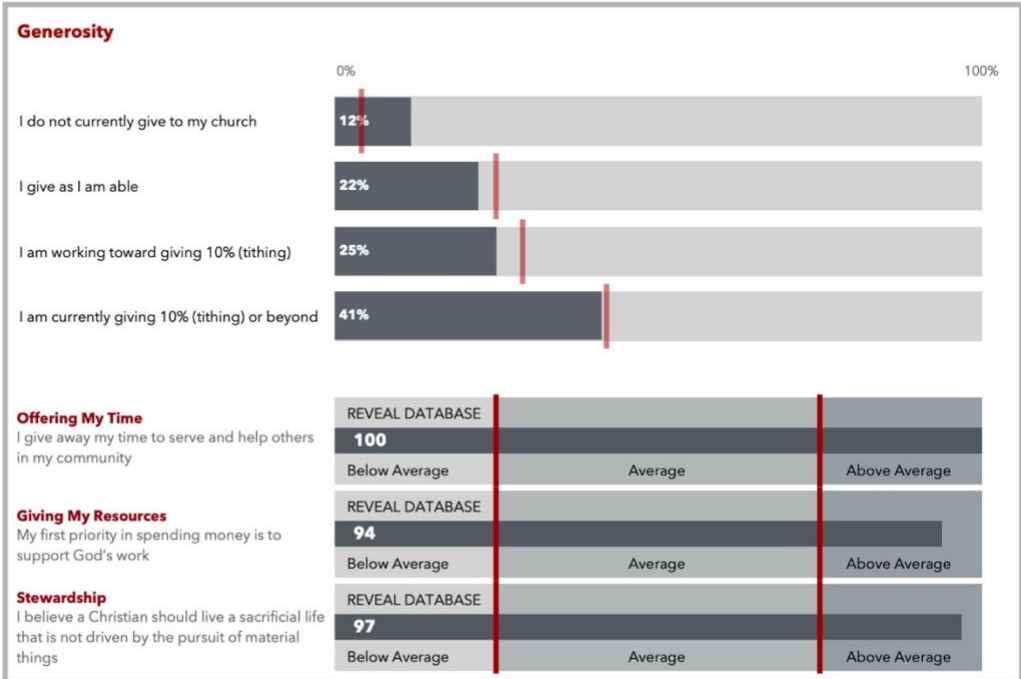
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Church Activities: Generosity

Generosity includes actual giving and serving behaviors and the beliefs and attitudes underlying those behaviors. Working to align congregants' minds and hearts with a biblical worldview is critical to promoting greater generosity in your church.





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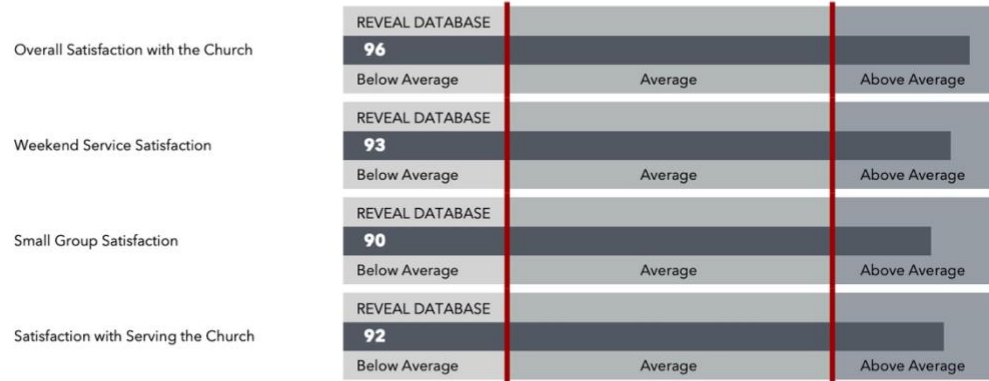
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Satisfaction: Church

REVEAL measures satisfaction with the church in each area below in the context of spiritual growth. Congregants rated how satisfied they are with the role of the church, weekend services, small groups and serving in promoting their spiritual growth.





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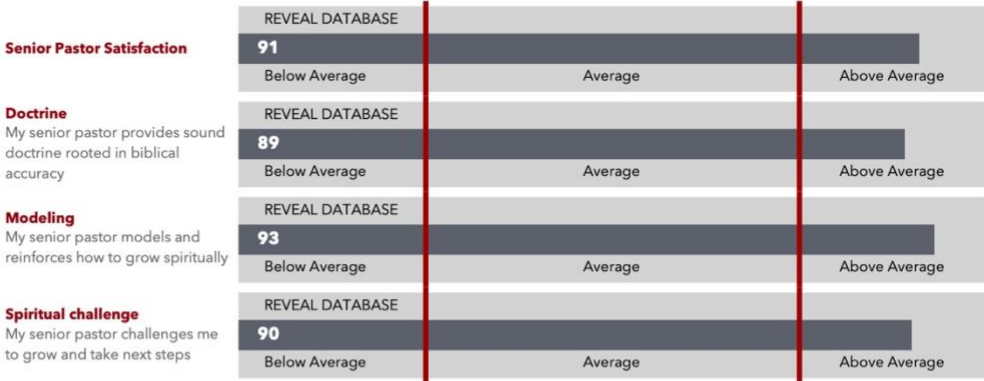
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Effectiveness: Senior Pastor

In nearly every church that has fielded REVEAL, satisfaction with the senior pastor eclipses satisfaction with the church overall. The difference is significant, typically 15-20 percentage points. Overall satisfaction is a measure of the senior pastor's leadership capital, which provides the pastor freedom to introduce changes to improve the spiritual vitality of the church. REVEAL's findings show that the three specific statements on this page are key to the senior pastor's effectiveness in driving spiritual growth in the church.





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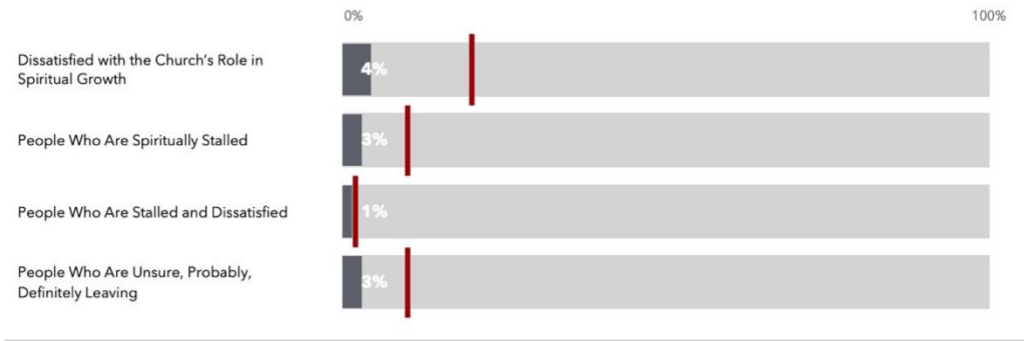
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Satisfaction: Barriers to Growth

From the earliest days of REVEAL, two barriers to spiritual growth have surfaced among the congregants of every participating church: being stalled and being dissatisfied. Over 70 percent of those who are spiritually stalled fall into the less mature segments on the Continuum. Dissatisfied congregants are distributed more evenly across all the segments. Not surprisingly, these two barriers overlap to some degree.





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Satisfaction: Your Dissatisfied Congregants

This chart identifies the five Best Practice items that your church's dissatisfied congregants rated the lowest. The percentiles reflect a comparison with the dissatisfied congregants in other churches in the REVEAL database. Interpret these percentiles similarly to the rest of the percentiles in the report, but as compared to dissatisfied congregants only. Scores below 25 indicate areas of particular concern; scores above 75 indicate less of a concern.





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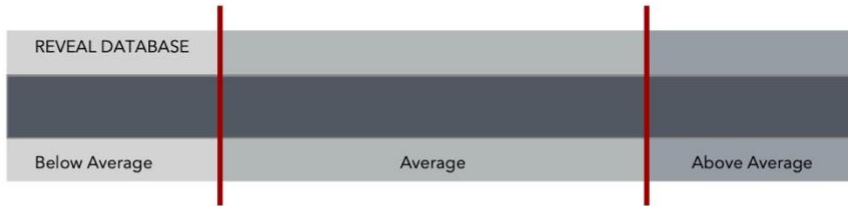
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Church Engagement: Overall Engagement Score

By God's design, engagement in a local church brings growth in maturity marked by an increased love of God, love of others, and even of ourselves. The Church Engagement Scale assesses the extent to which the congregants at your church are committed to following Christ at your church and are involved in the opportunities for growth that your church provides. The CES also is available as a stand-alone survey that takes less than 5 minutes to complete. It can be deployed as a quick pulse-check on the ways your church is changing between years in which your church takes the full REVEAL for Church Survey.

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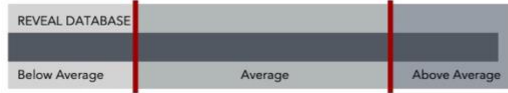
Church Engagement

Church Engagement: The Three Keys

A closer look at the three key areas of engagement offers a deeper dive into the details that produced your church's overall engagement score.

Catalytic Spiritual Practices

96

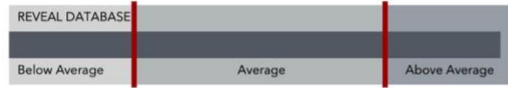


Catalytic Spiritual Practices

These practices include Bible study, relating to God personally in prayer, giving time to serve others, financial giving, and living a life characterized by God's peace. REVEAL research has shown these areas to be Below Average Average Above Average catalytic to spiritual growth.

Church Activities

98



Church Activities

Based on input from pastors around the country, the Church Engagement Score focuses on frequency of involvement in three church activities: worship service attendance, small group involvement, and serving in a church ministry.

Church Growth Environment

94



Church Growth Environment

Leaning into the REVEAL Best Practice Principles, the Church Engagement Score measures congregants' satisfaction with the church's environment for spiritual growth in the areas of creating ownership and helping people get moving on their growth journeys.



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Church Engagement Breakdown

Congregants were placed in one of the three groups based on their responses.

Minimally Engaged 13%	Somewhat Engaged 28%	Fully Engaged 59%
Congregants in this group have not yet committed themselves to following Christ in your congregation. Their engagement in church activities and catalytic spiritual practices is in the lowest 25% of all congregants who have taken REVEAL.	Congregants in this group are journeying with your church into a deeper level of engagement in church activities and catalytic spiritual practices, but could press in further. Their engagement is right around average compared to other congregants who have taken REVEAL.	Congregants in this group are all-in on the spiritual growth journey at your church. Their engagement in church activities and catalytic spiritual practices is in the top 25% of all congregants who have taken REVEAL.

REVEAL Database Comparison

