

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

**THE TRANSITIONING OF A NON-FUNCTIONAL CHURCH  
INTO A FUNCTIONAL CHURCH: THE GREAT  
COMMISSION COMMANDMENT MANDATE**

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

by  
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Liberty University School of Divinity

**Thesis Project Approval Sheet**

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## ABSTRACT

### THE TRANSITIONING OF A NON-FUNCTIONAL CHURCH INTO A FUNCTIONAL CHURCH: THE GREAT COMMISSION COMMANDMENT MANDATE

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Liberty University School of Divinity, 2016

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From conception, America has embraced the Christian church as its cornerstone. However, as noted by Barnes and Lowry, “Church attendance has decreased substantially in recent years in comparison to the 1950s and 60s. The majority of Americans do not attend church on a regular basis.”<sup>1</sup> This thesis project will research churches with regards to their effectiveness and will both isolate and analyze the characteristics of churches that fit into operative categories. A survey using a quantitative research instrument, such as the Likert Measurement Scale, will examine the New Hope Missionary Baptist Association of North Carolina. The survey’s purpose will be to evaluate characteristics, philosophies, programs, teachings, and worship methods that will be useful for churches. This thesis project will provide key concepts and a step-by-step biblical guide on how to transition a non-functional church into a Bible-focused functional church.

Abstract Length: 150 Words

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<sup>1</sup> Rebecca Barnes and Lindy Lowry, “Seven Startling Facts About Church Attendance.”

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NHMBANC	New Hope Missionary Baptist Associate of North Carolina
OT	Old Testament
Exod	Exodus
Isa	Isaiah
NT	New Testament
Col	Colossians
1-Cor	1-Corinthians
Matt	Matthew
1-Pet	1-Peter
Rev	Revelation
1-Thess	1-Thessalonians

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

“These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Jesus taught that when His followers are guided by His instructions, then peace will be a manifestation of His promise. However, with in the paradigm of prevailing church quandaries, such as dwindling attendance and support, many Christian religious sanctuaries have suffered. The days of old, when Sunday worship was the norm in every city and town, are gone. The attention of Christian leaders and church members has shifted to other priorities greatly affecting outreach to non-believers. Today, many churches have experienced neglect, and as a result, many ministries are suffering. Instead of being a beacon of light, these churches have become more world-oriented. Thus as penned in the gospel of John, these churches are experiencing difficulties because many have become disobedient to Christ’s teachings, and thus non-functional (John 16:33). However, in contrast, churches that are Jesus-centered and Kingdom-focused are continuously thriving and successful in its mission to win souls to Christ. These churches are biblically-based functional churches, and adhering to the application of The Great Commission that Jesus commanded in Matthew 28.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

America has undergone a myriad of radical cultural and religious changes, especially in recent decades. Statistics show that during the 1950s and 1960s, around fifty percent of all Americans attended church every week and about ninety percent attended every month. By

comparison, present day numbers are dwindling.<sup>2</sup> A recent study has shown that only about twenty percent of Americans attend church on a regular basis.<sup>3</sup> As noted, “While Gallup polls and other statisticians have turned in the same percentage — about 40% of the population — of average weekend church attendees for the past seventy years, a different sort of research paints quite a disparate picture of how many Americans attend a local church on any given Sunday.”<sup>4</sup> Olson, an Evangelical minister and researcher, conducted a several-decade long study that indicated that, in reality, only about half of the forty percent of people who say they go to church regularly, actually do so. In fact, his research showed that less than eighteen percent of Americans attend a Christian church (which includes Catholic, Evangelical, and mainline churches) on any given Sunday.<sup>5</sup> For Christians, this paints a very dismal picture because it conveys the message that modern society has failed to prioritize God and the church in their lives.

Thus, the purpose of this research is to evaluate how to correct the newfound issues of the contemporary church, which is a troubling characteristic of this nation’s spirituality. Undoubtedly, this disregard for Christian fellowship will leave a substantial and dramatic impact upon future generations. Therefore, this thesis project will aim to examine and contemplate effective strategic methods which can be efficiently utilized by pastors, ministerial leadership, and churches in the twenty-first century. A quantitative research instrument will be used to survey The New Hope Missionary Baptist Association of North Carolina, which consists of

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<sup>2</sup> Rebecca Barnes and Lindy Lowry, “Seven Startling Facts About Church Attendance.”

<sup>3</sup> Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual, but Not Religious* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 12.

<sup>4</sup> Barnes and Lowry, “Special Report: The Church In Crises,” *Outreach Magazine* (May-June 2006)

<sup>5</sup> Garry Wills, *Head and Heart* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), 23.

forty- three churches and approximately 1,080 members who attend on a regular basis.<sup>6</sup> The fundamental objective will be to explore innovative approaches and key concepts regarding how to transition a non-functional church into a Bible-focused, functional church.

### **Statement of Limitations**

While this paper will examine a wide-range of factors and influences that can be useful for churches to transition from operating as a non-functional church into a functional one, due to time, space and various other restrictions, this research will have strict limits. It will review processes and procedures which can be conveniently implemented by the modern church.

However, it will not:

- Describe, in depth, church history or the history of Christianity in America;
- Explain the history of worship, Bible studies, teaching, church philosophy, or methodology;
- Justify why Bible-based churches should be promoted or why the Bible should be taken to be the inerrant word of God;
- Explain, in depth, Baptist theology or church structure (to include leadership structure); or,
- Argue for or against controversial, present-day church issues that are facing congregations and the larger American public.

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<sup>6</sup> NHMBANC

## Theoretical Basis

### Key Terms

**Bible:** The Christian Old and New Testaments that consist of sixty-six books. The Bible will not include the Apocrypha or other books commonly found in Catholic and some other mainline denominations' Bibles. For this research, the King James Version will be used and regarded as authoritative throughout this paper.

**New Hope Missionary Baptist Association of North Carolina:** An organized association of Bible-based churches in the Baptist tradition. Currently, there are forty-three member churches located throughout North Carolina in the following counties: Alamance, Harnett, Orange, Durham, and Wake. The current moderator is Rev. Dr. Cornelius Battle. The Association was founded in 1885 and "born out of necessity and protest." The official website states, "In 1865, we refused to accept, any longer, a position of inferiority, but preferred to establish our own religious organization. It was in these churches that we started out, where we found unhampered opportunities for spiritual, social, political and economic uplift and leadership."<sup>7</sup> NHMBANC is mostly comprised of African-American members.

**Bible-Focused Church:** A church that believes in *sola scriptura* and bases all of its beliefs and practices on scripture. These churches are different from many mainstream Protestant and Catholic churches that hold other sources of authority, such as church history, personal experience, and reason. Bible-focused churches are spiritual, but hold the Bible as the ultimate and only authority.

**Biblical Inerrancy:** The belief that the Bible is the inerrant, literal word of God given to Gods' people. It is without error and should be taken as literal truth.

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<sup>7</sup> NHMBANC

Worship: The act of praising God in a collective and community-based atmosphere, typically within a church building but not limited to a specific place. For this research, worship is to honor God with extravagant love, devotion, and extreme submission.

Functional Church: A healthy, living church that meets three criteria. First, it has a mission, vision and purpose which are rooted in Jesus Christ and scripture. Second, it is focused on making new disciples and helping people to grow and mature in their faith. Third, it is a team or community-focused and oriented organization where all individual parts work together to glorify God. If these three conditions are met, then the church is described as forward-moving, blessed, and functional.

Non-Functional Church: An unhealthy church that does not meet the characteristics of a functional church. Unhealthy churches fail to meet one or more of the following three criteria: possess a mission, vision, and/ or purpose that is rooted in Jesus Christ and scripture; focus attention on making new disciples and helping people grow and mature in faith; or provide the atmosphere to foster a team or community-centered organization where the individual parts work in unison to glorify God. These churches are not forward-moving and are not adhering to the call of Jesus Christ. The Great Commission of the church is found in Matthew 28:16-20, and reads as follows:

"Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and spake unto them saying, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the very end of the age."<sup>8</sup>

This most significant passage clearly puts forth the whole Christian mission and agenda. It shows that we, as a community of believers, are tasked with developing and maintaining churches that

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<sup>8</sup> Matt. 28:16-20.

are functional. Non-functional churches are not part of the God's plan for God's people. They are not fulfilling the mission of the people of God; they do not bring people to Christ. With this in mind, it is essential that churches that are thriving and functioning be observed to determine exactly why they are able to survive in a culture where Christianity is dying.

Other researchers, such as sociologists Hadaway and Marler, support Olson's findings and report that about fifty-two million Americans attend church regularly, as opposed to the one hundred thirty-two million that traditional polls indicate.<sup>9</sup> Marler writes that, while mainline denominations have taken huge hits and experienced radical decreases in church attendance, some groups appear to be gaining some traction, especially Evangelical and Pentecostal movements. Marler concludes that, "Even a still-growing denomination like the Southern Baptist Convention had reported slowed growth. Most of the mainline denominations were all reporting a net loss over the past thirty years. And at the same time, the Gallup polls had remained stable. It didn't make sense."<sup>10</sup>

Based on these findings, it is fair to conclude that this evidence strongly suggests that church attendance may be lower than polls normally report. This problem is starting to present real and significant negative repercussions in America. Needless to say, many people are living lives without hope, purpose, or focus, and society has continued to secularize to a point where people feel that they no longer need or desire God, the church, or holiness.

Perhaps, Bird and Clegg's 2007 book, *Missing in America*, sums up the issue best when it states that:

"According to the latest research, one out of every three adults (thirty-three percent) in America is unchurched. This means they have not attended a religious service of any type during the past six months. This statistic represents

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<sup>9</sup> Kim Moreland, "The Decline of the Church," 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Lead the Church, "Great Article about Church Attendance In America." 2012.



approximately seventy three million adults, plus roughly twenty-seven million teens and children ages twelve and under for a total of one hundred million Americans.”<sup>11</sup>

It is uncertain as to how American culture will look in the future once Christianity is relegated to the margins of society and no longer plays a prominent role in the lives of American people and in the decisions of government leaders. Americans are slowly but steadily turning away from God and the results are devastating. This devastation is witnessed in the decline of morality in modern society; in light of rising divorce rates, broken homes, addictions, corruption, in addition to various other societal ills.

In the past, the church, as a whole, has undergone revivals when the Christian message was threatened. The First Great Awakening in America during the 1730s and 1740s was, in many ways, a reaction to a tendency for more and more people to move away from Christianity and towards deism. It worked, primarily with the people who were already affiliated with the church, but changed the focus towards more personal piety. This religious revival set the stage for the Second Great Awakening in the early nineteenth century, which was aimed specifically at those who were not affiliated with a church. One source appropriately writes, “The Second Great Awakening was a major religious movement in the U.S. that reached out to the unchurched and brought large numbers of people to a vivid experience of Christianity, fueling the rapid growth of numerous denominations, especially the Methodists, Baptists, and Disciples.”<sup>12</sup> The theoretical basis for this research, therefore, is the notion that in the past, revivals that specifically helped churched individuals become closer to God, and un-churched individuals become Christians, were very successful. By studying functioning churches, it is possible to create, perhaps, a Third

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<sup>11</sup> Tom Clegg and Warren Bird, *Missing In America* (Loveland, CO: Group Pub. 2007), 175.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 13.

Great Awakening to help make non-functioning churches more functional and in accordance with the Great Commission.

### **Statement of Methodology**

To adequately conduct this research, several different methodological approaches will be taken. The first chapter provides the introduction of this thesis project and will present information that is relevant and supportive of the research. This chapter will also prepare the reader with key biblical terms, the definitions of a functional and non-functional church as well as the importance of the Great Commission's mandate given in Matthew 28:16-20.

Chapter Two will be dedicated to better understanding the reason why certain churches fail. This chapter will try to identify common trends seen in churches that are not growing but, rather, are shrinking in membership. By isolating these factors, it will be possible to identify the underlying causes of why these churches are not functioning. These factors can be readily studied, analyzed, avoided, and overcome by church planters and already established churches.

Chapter Three will analyze functional churches and try to establish some of the criteria that make a church functional. This will be accomplished by researching functioning churches, administrators and pastors, and reading literature on church growth and planting. Once more, by isolating the factors associated with functioning churches, leaders can use this information to transition their churches or establish new churches that are functional.

Chapter Four will focus on the Lord's church, the first biblical church model in Acts Chapter Two. There will be a focus on what caused this biblical church to grow and fulfill the Great Commission with love, power, passion and purpose.

Chapter Five will focus on a survey and case study of the NHMBANC. It will provide detailed graphs and descriptions of respondents' answers and trends in participants'

understanding of what makes a church functional. Moreover, it will describe the impacts of these findings. It will also focus on the survey results for non-functioning churches. This chapter will provide detailed results showing respondents answers and trends in participants' understanding of what makes a church functional or non-functional. The NHMBANC has many positive characteristics and attributes such as the fact that it follows the original biblical model that is made up of many congregations of people who attend on a regular basis. In short, this is an association of churches that are functional, such as the biblical church described in Acts Chapter Two. The NHMBANC is taking the Great Commission seriously and meeting the needs of the local communities it serves. It will be a testimony to the power of functional churches and serve to help inspire leaders to spread the word of Christ by creating a living, Bible-based functional church.

Chapter Six will provide a step by step how- to guide for church leaders in particular, and churches as a whole, that will serve as a great resource to help transition a non-functional church to a functional church. This chapter will also include the conclusion and a prayer. It will also provide a systematic list of practical recommendations for helping churches make the transformation. It will assist as a means of helping new and old church leaders reconsider the churches' mission, focus, and outreach programs.

## Literature Review

### Books

Ahlstrom, Sydney E. *A Religious History of the American People*, (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1992.

This source helps to put into perspective religion in America and tracks its history through both Great Awakenings. It also shows its history of decline beginning in the 1960s. It serves as a starting point to identify where American culture went wrong and what can possibly be done to create churches that thrive and a culture that values them.

Clegg, Tom and Warren Bird. *Missing In America*, (Loveland, CO: Group Pub.), 2007.

Clegg and Warren's book will serve to establish the number of un-churched individuals in America and help to establish some reasons why the numbers are so high. Also, it will serve to establish what Americans are in need of, spiritually, and how the church can best meet these needs while remaining true to its intended purpose; namely to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Friesen, Abraham. *Erasmus, the Anabaptists, and the Great Commission*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.), 1998.

This book highlights church history that is pertinent to church development, planting, and the spread of the gospel. Since the early Church, leaders have been challenged with finding new and relevant ways to lead people to Christ. This book traces this history and provides insight on how various church leaders have overcome the obstacles of their time in order to do God's work.

Fuller, Robert C. *Spiritual, But Not Religious*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2001.

Fuller's detailed book sheds light on why people are, consistently, claiming to be spiritual but not religious. This highlights a major trend that is problematic in America. By abandoning Christianity in favor of spirituality, people are being led astray. The book helps to pinpoint what people need but are not receiving from most churches.

Heimert, Alan. *Religion and the American Mind, From the Great Awakening to the Revolution*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1966.

While slightly dated, this book remains an important summary of the Great Awakening and how it helped to rejuvenate Christianity in America. Many people contend that, today, churches need to undergo another Great Awakening to reach out to the un-churched and help non-functional churches become functional ones. This book shows how the Great Awakening's lessons can be applied to modern-day churches.

Hughes, Robert. *American Visions*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf), 1997.

This text shows the visions of the Founding Fathers, Puritans, and Anglican Church when founding this nation and identifies the Christian roots of America. It can be used as a means of reminding people of the Christian roots inherent in this religion.

Hunter, George G. *Church for the Unchurched*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press), 1996.

Hunter specifically studies un-churched individuals to identify why they do not have a church home. By listening to people, his study sheds valuable light on where the Church, as a whole, has failed to meet the needs of its people. This book can help to establish the characteristics of unchurched individuals so that leaders can help to make their churches more inclusive and welcoming.

Kidd, Thomas S. *The Great Awakening*, (New Haven: Yale University Press), 2007.

Kidd does an excellent job of tracing the history of the First and Second Great Awakenings and showing how they changed the Christian landscape in America. He highlights the positive and negative aspects of these movements and analyzes why they were effective. His understanding of these major Christian movements can serve as a framework for which to transition non-functional churches into functional ones.

Klaas, Alan C. *In Search of the Unchurched*, (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute), 1996.

Klaas provides additional information on the number of people who are unchurched and why they are without a church home. His book delves deep into the spiritual needs of the unchurched in order to provide a workable framework from which to try to encourage

people to rethink Christianity.

Lambert, Frank. *Inventing the "Great Awakening"*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press), 1999.

Lambert challenges previous analyses of the Great Awakening. His book is useful because it provides another lens by which to study this revival and offers additional resources for creating a possible new revival in the United States. His work will be instrumental in identifying lists of what works and what does not work for encouraging church growth.

Mays, James Luther, and Joseph Blenkinsopp. *The HarpersCollins Bible Commentary*, (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco), 2000.

A study Bible that contextualizes Bible passages and provides appropriate, scholarly commentary. This Bible will help with exegesis of Biblical passages and will serve as a text to put the work into a more appropriate context. It is pertinent for understanding the linguistic nuances involved in the text.

Payne, Jervis David. *Discovering Church Planting*, (Milton Keynes, U.K.: Paternoster Publishing), 2009.

Payne details church planting efforts that are successful and those that are unsuccessful. By studying the characteristics of each, it is possible to isolate the best and worse practices so that nonfunctional churches can avoid pitfalls and embrace positive change. The book will help set up a workable framework for creating functional churches.

Schaff, Philip, and David S. Schaff. *History of the Christian Church*, (New York: C. Scribner's Sons), 1882.

Although this book is antiquated, it helps to establish a basic history of the Christian Church prior to the modern era. It will be helpful for tracing the way in which the Bible was used to help churches grow and meet the needs of the people. It is a testimony to a time when the church was much more functional and better at meeting the needs of the people.

Schwarz, Christian A. *Natural Church Development*, (Carol Stream, IL: Church Smart Resources), 1996.

Schwarz looks at methods by which churches have become functional and furthered their development using natural methodologies. The author focuses on encouraging church growth in a natural way instead of forcing it upon people. This holistic approach has proven effective and serves as a great guide for leaders looking to create an inclusive, functional church. It will be used, primarily, for the suggestion chapter.

Schaller, Lyle E. *The Seven-Day-A-Week Church*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press), 1992.

Schaller focuses on how churches can encourage participants to think outside of the traditional “Sunday Church” mentality and, instead, incorporate Christian teachings into everyday life. Schaller’s book will be essential for helping establish churches that represent a seven day Christian lifestyle.

Shenk, David W and Ervin R. Stutzman. *Creating Communities of the Kingdom*, (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press), 1998.

The authors outline ways in which churches can interact with local communities to better serve the needs of the people. Through creating a great rapport with the community, churches grow and thrive. This book will help establish the outreach programs functional churches tend to have.

Wills Garry. *Head and Heart*, (New York: Penguin Books), 2008.

Wills evaluates the spiritual needs of people, in general, in hopes of giving pastors and church leaders new ideas on how to win their hearts with the gospel message. The author shows how people are hungry for God, but churches must find new, invigorating ways to meet their needs and to function in a pluralistic society. It will be pertinent for helping to establish the methods by which to transform churches.

#### Journal Articles

Brenner, P. S. "Exceptional Behavior or Exceptional Identity," Over reporting of Church Attendance in the US." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 75, no.1 (2011): 19-41.

This article sheds light on how few people actually attend church in the United States. It highlights the ongoing trends regarding low-church attendance and establishes the basic

justification for researching ways in which non-functional churches can transition and grow.

Maley, G. M. "Book Review": Church Planting In Uganda, A Comparative Study. *Missiology: An International Review* 6, no.4 (1978): 525-527.

Maley provides an overview of a few church plants in Uganda to study their effectiveness and efficiency. Looks at the methods by which new church plants have been shown to be successful in other parts of the world.

Miller, P. D. "Bible--Theology--Church." *Theology Today* 42, no. 3 (1985): 275-279.

Miller looks at ways in which the church can remain relevant and vibrant while still remaining true to traditional church theology and Biblical scholarship. This article is relevant for helping nonfunctional churches develop solid theology.

Steffen, T. A. "Selecting a Church Planting Model That Works." *Missiology: An International Review* 22, no. 3, (1994): 361-376.

Steffen details the various methods by which church planters can select the best option for their intended audience. The author provides practical guidelines for making a church functional and healthy in today's world.

New Hope Missionary Baptist Association of North Carolina.

This is the primary church community that will be studied. This Baptist Association exhibits its purpose, leadership, objectives, beliefs, and agendas through its various congregations. It will be used as the example of a functioning church.

#### Scripture Passages

All cited scripture references will be annotated from the King James Version.

Old Testament

Exodus 19:5-6



Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

This passage clearly shows that people are supposed to go out and speak to all people, spread the word, and keep God's covenant to God's people. It is useful in determining the purpose of the Church.

Isaiah 6:8

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.

This Biblical passage attests to our duty to spread God's word to God's people. We are called to create functional churches that proclaim the good news.

New Testament

Matthew 24:14

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

This passage states the duty of all followers of Christ. It will be used to show how the church is to be a witness to the world, and emphasize the Christian's obligation to spread the Gospel.

Matthew 28:18-20

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

This most significant passage clearly puts forth the whole Christian mission and agenda. It shows that we, as a community of believers, are tasked with developing and maintaining churches that are functional. Non-functional churches are not part of the God's plan for God's people. They are not fulfilling the mission of the people of God; they do not bring people to Christ.

Matthew 16:18

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

The passage highlights the significance of the Church and the mission of each and every person to follow Christ and support His Church. It highlights the obligation of everyone and the importance of spreading the Good News.

Revelations 7:9

After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;

It was revealed that there will be a multitude of people in heaven from various nations and ethnic backgrounds. All of these individuals will be clothed in white and holding palm branches to usher in Christ.

God clearly expects people from the whole of the earth to be redeemed. It is our job, therefore, to create functional churches so that God's plan will prevail and people can rejoice with the Lord.

Acts 20:28

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

The Disciples of Christ are ordered to follow the instructions of Christ and recognize that that Holy Spirit has made these individuals leaders of the flock. Moreover, these individuals are told to shepherd the Church of God, which was purchased with Christ's blood.

God's flock is the people of the Church. Our job is to create a functional church and help those who do not know God to become part of the Kingdom by hearing the Gospel. This passage emphasizes this responsibility.

Mark 16:15

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

This passage highlights the Church's main job. It will be used to judge whether or not a church is functional or not. A functional church preaches the good news; a non-functional church preaches what is convenient and desirable.

Luke 24:46-48

And said unto them, thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things.

This provides the basic justification for Christians to witness to the people of the world and tell them the Good News of Christ. It is a command, given by Christ, and, therefore, a church must follow it to be functional.

John 20:21

Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. Jesus offers His disciples peace and tells them that, just as the Father sent Him, so, too, He sends out the disciples.

This passage highlights the church's main job. It will be used to judge whether or not a church is functional or not, and shows the responsibility of all Christians to spread the Word of God.

1 Peter 2:9-10

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light; Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

Peter declares that this generation is chosen, by God. This generation is obligated to declare the Good News of Christ, since they are now a people of God whereas, before Christ, they were not. God's flock is the people of the church. Our job is to create a functional church and help those who do not know God to become part of the Kingdom by hearing the Gospel. This is relevant for substantiating the need of a functional church.

1 Thessalonians 3:12

And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you:

Paul asks the Lord to make the disciples numerous and prosperous so that the Church can grow and love can abound.

This passage highlights the church's main job. It will be used to judge whether or not a church is functional or not, and shows the responsibility of all Christians to spread the love of God.

Luke 15:4

What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?

This passage highlights the inherent dignity and worth of each individual. It provides the church with the motivation to spread the Word of God and can be used to emphasize the obligation each Christian has to preach the Good News.

Colossians 1:3-5

We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,  
Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints,  
For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel;

This passage sheds light on the purpose of the Church and the job of the people of God to help people to become part of the Kingdom of Heaven. It also shows the importance of prayer for all churches to include non-functional churches.

1 Corinthians 12:20

But now are they many members, yet but one body.

While there will always be disagreements within any church, it is essential to note that all people are made in God's image and are part of the body of Christ. The church should unite and not divide.

## CHAPTER 2

### UNDERSTANDING THE REASONS BEHIND WHY CHURCHES FAIL

#### Major Reasons Why Churches Fail

This chapter will carefully analyze some of the major reasons churches fail. Each year, thousands of churches close their doors never to reopen again. Many more are on the brink of collapse and, likely, will fail within the next several years.<sup>13</sup> Despite many efforts to plant new churches and engage in new types of ministry, the overarching trend in America is that more and more people are leaving the church.<sup>14</sup> Prior to addressing this concern, it is essential to identify the major reasons why so many churches fail. In sum, this chapter will establish common trends seen in churches that are not growing but, rather, are shrinking in membership and number. By isolating these factors, it will be possible to identify why these churches are not functioning. These factors can be readily studied, analyzed, avoided, and overcome by church planters and already established churches.

#### Church Refused to Represent the Demographics of the Community

Studies show that one common trend among churches that fail is that the demographics inside the building do not represent the demographics outside of the building.<sup>15</sup> Of course, it is not always feasible to have exact replication; however, the most successful churches tend to embrace the people in the communities where they are located and, at a minimum, do not create

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<sup>13</sup> Tom Clegg and Warren Bird, *Missing In America*, 17.

<sup>14</sup> Roy Eusebius and John Deferrari, *Ecclesiastical History* (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), xi.

<sup>15</sup> George G. Hunter III, *Church for the Unchurched* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 33.

environments that discourage community members from attending and joining the church.<sup>16</sup> One study examined the detailed deterioration of a church that, in just over twenty-five years, had gone from 750 members to four. While the location was not identified for confidentiality reasons, the researcher noted that, in the 1970s, the community where the church was located was upper class; however, by the late 1990s it had transitioned toward a lower socio-economic class. Due to changes in local industry, most people were considered to be “working poor” or unemployed. Yet, the members of the church were still, largely, solid middle class. Even more importantly, the members had no desire to reach out to new residents. The research described the congregation as “an island of middle-class members in a sea of lower-class residents.”<sup>17</sup> In the end, a church like this is not serving the community but, instead, is only serving its own self-interests. This is not the purpose of the church; this is the fault of people who are prone to fall short of the glory of God and fail to recognize the Lord’s call to make disciples and care for the least of these.

Many churches are not able or willing to change with the times and open their doors to people of various socio-economic classes, ethnicities, and cultures. Church plant researchers and experts note that the churches must recognize that their members have to come from their local populations.<sup>18</sup> People are not able or willing, for the most part, to drive long distances to belong to a church that fits their demographics. Besides, this misses a major component of what the church should be, what it stands for, and who it represents. Today, probably the direst challenge most churches face is trying to get beyond race. Churches remain largely segregated. A large

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 19.

<sup>17</sup> George G. Hunter III, *Church for the Unchurched*, 72.

<sup>18</sup> Jacob Kavunkal. "Jubilee the Framework of Evangelization." *Mission Studies* 5, no. 1 (1988): 42.

number of churches that fail do not represent the diverse racial demographics of the area in which they are located.<sup>19</sup> This is incredibly problematic and is, for the most part; always a recipe for disaster as these churches do not have what it takes to survive in their communities. Rather, they will likely collapse with time.

### Lack of Community-Focused Ministries

Moreover, many churches fail because they become so concerned with focusing their attention inward that they forget that their job is to focus outward and engage in community-based ministries and programs. “Far too many churches that fail operate under the basic understanding of the church as a building that is open on Sunday mornings and, maybe, mid-week for a Bible study.”<sup>20</sup> These churches tend to look at the church as a community organization that is there to serve a weekly need of the people who attend services. They do not see the church as a living organism that is made up of people and community and, to thrive, the church must reach out and serve the community. “Many dying churches lack any type of community-driven ministry, in part, because they think church is a building instead of an active community of people trying to do God’s will.”<sup>21</sup>

Some failing churches do have ministries that are community focused, yet they are unsuccessful because they do not address any real need of the community. For instance, in an upper-middle class neighborhood, there is little need for a soup kitchen. Instead, the community might need more help with childcare or homework help since both parents, oftentimes, work outside of the home. Likewise, a working class, migrant community might not need a community

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Kavunkal, “Jubilee the Framework of Evangelization,” 45.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.



outreach program aimed at helping to create a senior activity center as much as they might need a soup kitchen, food bank, clothing closet, or school-supply donations. “Community outreach programs that do not actually benefit the community they are intended to serve and are misdirected are characteristic of many churches that fail.”<sup>22</sup> Rather, they seem to only benefit the members inside the church and not the community at large.

Alan C. Klas has observed that community ministries that fail are not addressed in “front-end” membership classes.<sup>23</sup> In other words, research has shown that the best way to shape membership responsibilities and expectations is to talk about them when someone becomes a new member of the church. Rarely are community outreach programs and member expectations thoroughly addressed and, therefore, the members are not privy to what is expected and what they can do to help. Instead, churches tend to be so anxious to build their membership numbers that they do not emphasize responsibility and obligation. Also, failing churches tend to have ministry programs that are seen as an end, rather than a means. “This leads to a sense of legalistic obligations instead of a true and earnest desire to do God’s will out of love for Christ.”<sup>24</sup>

#### Members Focused on Memorials

Yet another characteristic commonly seen in failing churches is a congregation that has forgotten that each member is a part of a living church. Instead, members become too focused on memorials. Scholars and pastors recognize the importance of memorials for members of the church and strongly advocate that churches include such thing in their buildings and

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<sup>22</sup> Alan C. Klass, *In Search of the Unchurched* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1996), 22.

<sup>23</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Mission of the Church* (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), chapter 1.

<sup>24</sup> Schillebeeckx. *The Mission of the Church*, chapter 1.

ceremonies.<sup>25</sup> People need and want memorials to help honor and remember their loved ones who have passed on. Memorials, in and of themselves, are not a concern. They become an issue however, whenever members become over-focused on them. Not only is it a way of making poorer members, who cannot afford to buy a chair, window, or table, or help fund the building of a new room or place, feel marginalized, but it also encourages competition that should not exist within the Church.

Churches that fail tend to focus so much on remembering the past and the lives of past members or family members that they fail to take an honest and genuine look at the present needs of their members.<sup>26</sup> There is nothing wrong with remembering loved ones and past events, but when it becomes an obsession or prohibits some members from fully participating in community, and then memorials become problematic. Memorials, therefore, should be included, but they should be small, relatively inexpensive (like flowers), and not the major focus of the church. This will help everyone to feel significant and not just the rich, or people who have been in the church for generations.

#### Lack of Evangelistic Emphasis

Churches that fail tend to forget the Great Commission given by Jesus to His disciples. In Mark 16:15, Jesus ordered his disciples to go out, into the world, and preach the Good News. This passage highlights the Church's main job, namely to evangelize. The ability of a church to spread the good news to people should be used to judge whether or not a church is functional or not. A functional church preaches the Good News; a non-functional church preaches what is

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<sup>25</sup> David Shenk and Ervin R Stutzman, *Creating Communities of the Kingdom* (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald Press), 1998.

<sup>26</sup> David Shenk and Ervin R Stutzman, *Creating Communities of the Kingdom*.

convenient and desirable. Whenever a church loses its overarching passion to reach out to others, it tends to die. Dave Earley states, “The Great Commission has been worshipped, but not obeyed. The church has tried to get world evangelization without disciple making.”<sup>27</sup> The members must keep in mind that their primary responsibility is to spread the good news of Christ’s death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins. In today’s society, many churches are uncomfortable fulfilling this fundamental obligation. “As a result, they fail to grow and thrive. While studies show that tact and respect for other worldviews should be taken into strong consideration, by and large, churches that evangelize, thrive, while those that do not, die.”<sup>28</sup> There are appropriate ways to evangelize without turning people away from Christ and His message.

#### Internal Strife Concerning Individual Wants

Sadly, many churches fail because their members cannot and will not get along with one another. Instead of focusing on appropriate issues and working together for the good of Christ, they put petty, selfish disagreements and interests before the worship and honoring of God. A former pastor of a dying church noted that, “As the church continued to decline toward death, the inward focus of the members turned caustic. Arguments were more frequent; business meetings became more acrimonious.”<sup>29</sup> Research shows that during hard times, many people within the church begin to display selfish and self-serving tendencies. “Some psychologists note that this may be a way of dealing with the stress involved in watching a church decline, and anticipating

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<sup>27</sup> Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group 2013), 1.

<sup>28</sup> Todd A. Steffen. ”Selecting a Church Planting Model That Works,” *Missiology, An International Review* (22, no. 3, 1994), 361-376.

<sup>29</sup> Claudia Walhrisch-Oblau,. *The Missionary Self-Perception of Pentecostal/Charismatic Church Leaders, from the Global South in Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 105.

its pending death.”<sup>30</sup> Regardless of the reasons why this strife manifests, the repercussions are always harmful, and the decline of the church accelerates. Of course, God does not want strife within the walls of the church because it does not represent Christian love.

Failing churches, more often than not, have no clear and effective way of dealing with the needs of their members. They also, at times, tend to have boundary issues. Their leaders lack effective means of dealing with members who lead the congregation away from its mission to serve the people of God. Petty concerns, such as the color of the carpet, the order of worship, or even pew ownership, have been known to cause entire congregations to divide and even cease to exist. “A lack of leadership and communication can allow these nominal issues to control the climate of the church and ruin it.”<sup>31</sup> Browning states that, “the most rapid way for a church to replicate is to subscribe to the KISS method: keep it simple and scalable.”<sup>32</sup>

#### Lack of Community/ Corporate Prayer

Prayer is an essential part of a Christian life. This is a means for the people of God to enter into deep and meaningful communion with God. Healthy churches tend to emphasize the benefits of community prayer, whereas failing churches rarely engage in corporate prayer. A study of some 200 failed or failing churches found that, on average, members engaged in corporate prayer for three-minutes each week. On the other hand, the same study analyzed the community prayer of thriving and growing churches and found that, on average, these churches’ members dedicated over thirty-five minutes each week to group prayer. Some churches even had

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 106.

<sup>31</sup> Garry Wills, *Head and Heart* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008).

<sup>32</sup> Dave Browning, *Deliberate Simplicity: How the Church Does More by Doing Less* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 185.

weekly prayer meetings where the intended purpose was, exclusively, to engage in community prayer.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, failing churches rarely pray for people and events outside the immediate realm of the members, their families and friends, and physical needs. Little attention is given to praying for the needs of others outside of the church, the health of the local and global community, the spiritual wellbeing of the members and nonmembers, and guidance for leaders and representatives. “Selfish, inward-focused prayer dominates in many failing churches.”<sup>34</sup> While this type of prayer is necessarily and essential, it should not be the only type of prayer a church engages in on a regular basis. Outward focused, community prayer should be a staple in all churches and emphasized by church leaders. It demonstrates, above all else, the church’s compassion for others and ourselves are revealed in the “Principles of Prayer.”<sup>35</sup>

#### Lack of Clarity on Purpose of Existence

By and large, churches that fail tend to lack a mission, purpose, and vision. These are all characteristics of forward-thinking churches. A mission statement defines for members the overarching goal of the church. Mission statements help to focus the members outward and into the larger community of Christ. They provide both direction and meaning. If a church lacks a mission, it is left to human-made and human-manipulated agendas.<sup>36</sup> The mission of all churches

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<sup>33</sup> Walhrisch-Oblau, “The Missionary Self-Perception of Pentecostal/Charismatic Church Leaders.”

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Elmer L. Towns and Roy B. Zuck, *The Prayer Bible* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publisher, 2014), 1813.

<sup>36</sup> Shenk and Stutzman, *Creating Communities of the Kingdom*, 99.

should be Bible-focused and oriented toward honoring and worshiping God, as well as spreading the gospel. Without a mission statement, the congregation is more susceptible to failure.<sup>37</sup>

Second, failing churches lack a clear understanding of their purpose. This leads the members to begin to believe that their purpose is self-serving. Without a defined purpose, members begin to question why they attend church. If they cannot see immediate, self-serving benefits, they may not remain an active church member. “Failing churches are made up of members who do not understand that their purpose – as the body of the church – is specific and selfless.”<sup>38</sup> Malphurs calls a church understanding its purpose as, “How to Discover Your Values. The discovery of your actual core values reveals your DNA or identity.”<sup>39</sup>

Finally, without a future-oriented vision, most churches die. Vision is essential to keeping a church on track and maintaining an overall plan for moving forward. Living churches recognize that more attention should be placed on the future than the past. While the past gives guidance, history, and direction, the future marks the return of Christ. “Without a vision, churches tend to fail because they are focusing their attention in the wrong places.”<sup>40</sup> It is not focused on honoring and glorifying God and His word to His people, but rather is largely focused on honoring humans and their selfish concerns, interests, and agendas, which are not God’s.

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<sup>37</sup> P. D. Miller, "Bible--Theology—Church," *Theology Today* (42, no. 3, 1985), 275.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A New Model for Church and Ministry Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 113.

<sup>40</sup> Shenk and Stutzman, *Creating Communities of the Kingdom*, 39-42; 67-69.

## Members Idolized the Past

Failing churches are often "stuck in the past." The members look back, fondly, on a former time when church attendance was higher and a specific order of worship (with specific hymns, liturgies, and style of worship) was the norm. This idealized past rarely, if ever, reflects the needs and wants of younger generations who are desperately in need of a church home.<sup>41</sup> Instead, it reflects a time gone by. Studies repeatedly show that mostly, this is a problem in dying churches where the majority of the active members are over sixty-five. Older people tend to remember the past fondly and sometimes to the point of idolatry. In doing so, they see their church's future as mimicking and returning to the past. This is a hard battle for church leaders to overcome. Many members insist that they want to growth their churches and even note that they are willing to change; however, when it actually comes down to it, few are really willing to make the changes necessary to thrive. Cole and Helfer in their book, *Church Transfusion, Changing your Church Organically from the Inside Out* states, "A church with new Christians will transfuse more easily than one with more mature Christians."<sup>42</sup> Shenk and Stutzman suggest what the end results of the refusal of a church to transfuse, "In the end, these churches fail and die, and the Christian community experiences a loss."<sup>43</sup>

## Budget Issues

Finally, some churches fail due to little finances or mismanagement of funds. Malphurs states, "reality therapy, ministry cost money! Actually, I should say that ministry cost lots of

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<sup>41</sup> Steffen, "Selecting a Church Planting Model That Works".

<sup>42</sup> Neil Cole and Phil Helfer, *Church Transfusion: Changing Your Church Organically From The Inside Out* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 40.

<sup>43</sup> Shenk and Stutzman, *Creating Communities of the Kingdom*, 22-25.

money.”<sup>44</sup> Of course, as congregations become smaller and smaller, churches are left with less money to operate; however, many churches have enough money, even with a dwindling congregation, yet do not use their money wisely. Some costs are fixed and cannot be lessened. Many costs can be reduced or eliminated altogether. Churches that fail often have poorly made budgets and make a habit of overspending. “These churches may not be willing to make the necessary cuts – such as hiring a part time instead of full time pastor, asking church members do repair and maintenance instead of hiring it out, or even cutting out non-essentials such as long-distance phone service and internet access.”<sup>45</sup> Moreover, budget issues can and do lead to major disagreements within the church. This can drive the final nail in the coffin of an already dying church. Just like individuals, churches must adopt solid financial policies that ensure the health and wellbeing of the organization for the long haul.

#### Lessons for Church Planters and Already-Established Churches

Based on the findings of this chapter, there are several pertinent lessons that church planters and already-established churches can take and apply to their particular situations. Even failing churches can serve God if their mistakes are noted and used to remedy other churches’ shortcomings. Instead of looking at failed churches as strictly a loss, they should be viewed as a learning opportunity. The following are four (relatively easy to implement) takeaway lessons for churches.

#### Honor the Past, but Live in the Present and Focus on the Future

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<sup>44</sup> Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A New Model for Church and Ministry Leaders* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Books, 2005), 255.

<sup>45</sup> Shenk and Stutzman, *Creating Communities of the Kingdom*, 22-25.



We know, from scripture, the Jesus honored the past. He quoted the Old Testament and recognized its importance in developing a proper understanding of God and God's people. However, Jesus cared for the spiritual and physical needs of people living in the present. He lived in the present and helped everyone he met by responding to their current needs. "Meanwhile, he preached of a future Kingdom of God, and provided guidance on how his followers could prepare for the future."<sup>46</sup> Churches that thrive should pay close attention to the model provided by Jesus and seek to copy it. Nothing short of this model will lead to success because it will fail to honor God.

### Recognize the Church's Purpose

The Church as a corporate whole has an overarching purpose – namely to fulfill the Great Commission and proclaim the Good News of Christ. Successful churches focus their attention on this great purpose and are not sidetracked by unnecessary distractions. Therefore, new church plants and already-established churches should always ensure that this purpose is foremost in each and every member's mind. Only by recognizing the centrality of purpose can churches hope to honor God and provide an invaluable resource for the people of Christ. Before any mission work or outreach programs are established, they should be carefully considered to see how they reflect the church's purpose. "If they do not, they should be abandoned because they are not honoring the Lord."<sup>47</sup> Purposes are both general and specific. The general purpose of the church is to make disciples for Christ. However, a church must serve other purposes as well and is not just mandated to spread the Good News. Purposes can be helping the homeless, caring for the disenfranchised, aiding the elderly and widows, and promoting a safe environment for the

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<sup>46</sup> Walhrisch-Oblau, *The Missionary Self-Perception of Pentecostal/Charismatic Church Leader*, chapter 3.

<sup>47</sup> Steffen, "Selecting a Church Planting Model That Works," 362-365.

community to meet and praise God. This is the true purpose of the church and must remain a top priority for all congregations.

### Honor the Needs of the Community

Different communities need different types of help. Jesus did not physically heal the physically healthy or provide spiritual guidance to those who were already in right relationship with God. He did not clothe those who had garments or feed those who were already well-fed. Instead, He looked at the needs of each and every person, on both an individual and community basis, and responded to their individual needs. This too, should be the focus of all churches. They must carefully consider the needs of their communities and members and, only once these basic needs are identified, introduce programs and mission work that reflects these needs. No matter what the needs of the community might be; spiritual, physical, mental, or all of the above, it is the job of the church to try to meet them. “Some needs are easier to fulfill while others are harder. It might be easy for a church to serve the needs of the hungry but harder for a congregation to serve the needs of the spiritually deprived. Both are important and need to be considered.”<sup>48</sup> Good leadership is often necessary to help a congregation recognize their shortcomings and to direct them onto a path of righteousness that truly honors and glorifies Christ in all aspects. As suggested by Dr. Elmer L. Towns, “The essence of Christianity has always been a focus on others.”<sup>49</sup>

Communities suffer when churches and other organizations fail to meet the needs of the community. Often, this is a consequence of pride and haughtiness. It might be more rewarding to cook a nice meal for people or rock babies than to shovel snow or mow lawns, but if the latter is

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<sup>48</sup> Wills, *Head and Heart*, chapter 2.

<sup>49</sup> Elmer L. Towns, *What's Right With the Church, A Manifesto of Hope* (Ventura, California: Regal From Gospel Light, 2009), 136.

needed, then that is what the church must offer. Even if a church has good intentions, when they put their own wants and needs before the needs and wants of the community, they fail to serve and honor God. Some churches are too concerned with impressing their wealthier members and community residents than helping those in need. This manifests in many ways, such as hosting elaborate dinners and events that cost the church money but, in turn, do not fulfill a need but, instead, a want or desire.

### Establish Solid Outreach Programs and Evangelize

Today, many people are uncomfortable with evangelization through outreach programs; however, this need not be the case. Evangelization does not have to take on the form of going door to door to proclaim the Good News. Rarely, if ever, do modern day evangelists stand on street corners shouting out the word of God at passersby. Instead, evangelism takes on the form of acting out the Good News and word of God through directly engaging individuals in their moments of need. Evangelization can be done by opening a soup kitchen, setting up a homework help program for after school care, or sending care packages to shut-ins. All of these are ways individuals and the church as a whole can work together to spread the Good News of Christ. Actions speak much louder than words, yet words are important, too. “Churches must remember, always, to mimic the life and teachings of Christ – who gained His followers through His actions and, then, educated them with His Word of Truth.”<sup>50</sup>

The demands Jesus places on his disciples are not easy. Rather, they are hard and require one to pick up their crosses and follow Christ, even on uncomfortable paths. The cost of discipleship is not to be taken lightly, and churches must, unashamedly, teach their members to make disciples for Christ. It is the call of each and every disciple and must be prioritized.

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<sup>50</sup> Wills, *Head and Heart*, chapter 2.

Without this key element, the church is certain to fail. Will McRaney Jr. states that, “God initiates conversion but uses humans. People have been and continue to be on the mind, heart, and agenda of God. Evangelism and conversion truly are spiritual activities. It is our privilege to be an active part of the process of evangelism leading toward conversion.”<sup>51</sup>

In summary, this chapter outlined some of the more prevalent characteristics of churches that fail to thrive and, instead, are dying and risking closing their doors forever. In general, it is fair to state that failing churches fall short of honoring and glorifying the Lord. Instead, they become concerned with personal wants and interests to love God and to demonstrate this love to the community. That is not to say that all churches that fail to thrive and grow do not honor God and put Him first, but it is fair to note that this is a common trend. The next chapter will emphasize the trends and characteristics of churches that are growing and thriving. It will pinpoint specific traits these churches share. This will provide a vital roadmap for churches that are running the risk of closing their doors.

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<sup>51</sup> Will McRaney Jr, *Sharing Jesus In A Changing Culture: The Art of Personal Evangelism* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2003), 42.

### **CHAPTER 3: UNDERSTANDING THE REASONS CHURCHES THRIVE AND GROW**

This chapter will analyze functional churches and try to establish some of the criteria that make a church functional. A healthy church meets three criteria. First, it has a mission, vision, and/ or purpose that is rooted in Jesus Christ and scripture. Second, it is focused on making new disciples and helping people to grow and mature in their faith. Third, it is a community-focused and community-oriented organization where the entire individual parts work together to glorify God. If these three conditions are met, then the church is described as forward-moving, blessed, and functional.

Identifying the criteria that make a church functional can be accomplished by surveying functioning church administrators and pastors, and reading literature on church growth and planting. By isolating the factors associated with functioning churches, leaders can use this information to transition their churches or establish new churches that are functional. After carefully reviewing the available literature, the following characteristics were seen in many or even most churches that were thriving and growing for the glory of God. Chapter Two parallels the preceding chapter because the strengths of a thriving church coincide with the weaknesses of a failing or dying church. By studying the strengths of functional churches, church leaders can compare their churches to the characteristic of thriving churches. This chapter should provide a set of guidelines by which churches can measure their effectiveness and see where they may need to adjust or make improvements to truly honor and serve God.

#### **A Roadmap to the Kingdom of God**

About two decades ago, Rick Warren penned, *The Purpose Driven Church*. In it, he emphasized the importance of churches having a clear and concise overarching purpose. He wrote, “Churches that are clear about why they exist and what they should be doing are most

likely to be growing congregations.”<sup>52</sup> Moreover, research demonstrates that not just any purpose will do. A misguided purpose that is focused on worldly concerns will only result in a individual-based, unstable church. Growth might be apparent, at first, but these churches soon die because they are not founded on Biblical principles and the love of God for God’s people. “Even if they do thrive and grow, they are not worthy of being classified as churches of Jesus Christ.”<sup>53</sup> Rather, they are simply meeting grounds, similar to a community municipal building or local hangout. Certainly, they are not what Jesus had in mind when he told Peter to build His Church.

Undoubtedly, there is no legitimate purpose of a church that is not centered on articulating to others, through words, actions, deeds, and lifestyle, the Good News of Christ’s death and His Resurrection. It is through this message – and this message alone – that people come to Christ and are able to enter into covenant with Him. This is the ultimate purpose of all churches, to make disciples and teachers of Christ out of everyday sinful people. Growing and thriving churches always place this mission first and take their responsibility to go out, spread the word, and create disciples very seriously. “Leadership in thriving churches not only recognizes this responsibility, but acts upon it and teaches their parishioners how to implement these beliefs into their everyday lives and interactions with others.”<sup>54</sup> They take the message found in the Good News personally and make it their personal duty to do their part to see it to fulfillment.

Schillebeeckx adds that, “ a God-centered church is warm and loving, but the message is uncompromised. These churches do not settle for less than preaching the Word of God and they

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<sup>52</sup> Warren, Rick, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995).

<sup>53</sup> Fuller, Robert C. *Spiritual, but Not Religious* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>54</sup> David Shenk and Ervin R. Stutzman, *Creating Communities of the Kingdom* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1998), 4.

will not tolerate a reduced or watered-down message. Instead, a strong emphasis must be placed on the importance of belief in Christ's message and gift of salvation."<sup>55</sup> The Apostle Paul was quite clear in his writings in 1 Corinthians 2:2: "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." This is the keystone message of all thriving churches. By the same token, Paul was also grateful for all those who cared for the poor and acted lovingly to others. "Yet, the central, dominating message he proclaimed revolved around Christ crucified."<sup>56</sup> Everything else was secondary and, so too, it should be in modern churches that wish to serve God, preach Christ crucified, and thrive in a world where church is becoming less important to many due to changing social norms and ideals.

Much research has been conducted on thriving and growing churches. These churches' leaders tend to use their time wisely and dedicate it to making new disciples/ followers of Christ. Their facilities and resources, too, are dedicated to preaching the Good News of Christ."<sup>57</sup> This does not mean that they do not tend to the needs of the poor in physical and monetary matters; however, they do so for the love of Christ and Christ's great gift – not to win brownie points or make themselves appear good. They earnestly recognize that they cannot earn their way into heaven. Instead, it is the message of the cross that allows anyone to be with God eternally. "By loving and accepting Christ's free gift, Christians come into communion with God and can rest easily in the promise of salvation and everlasting life. This is the central keystone of their message."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Mission of the Church, Her Purpose, and Her People* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

<sup>57</sup> Payne. *Discovering Church Planting*, 109-111.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*

Willis argues that, “the use of money is a great test to see if a church is, in fact, focused on the Kingdom of God. Churches that are productive, thriving, and growing actually have fewer disagreements concerning money.”<sup>59</sup> “When a bequest is given that is undesignated, there will be little argument or even discussion on how it should be spent. Rather, the vestry will automatically apply the funds to its overarching mission.”<sup>60</sup> One example of a church that is thriving because it is focused on making disciples is located in a Hispanic area of Dallas, Texas. As soon as undesignated bequests come in to the church, the money goes immediately to their youth discipleship program. It is an afterschool program that is dedicated to helping at-risk youth find wholesome activities to occupy their time. “Instead of the youth being on the streets, joining gangs, and causing chaos, they are engaging in physically fun activities in a safe environment, while being taught and disciplined by elders in the church.”<sup>61</sup> A recent study demonstrated that about thirty-five to forty percent of all thriving and growing churches strongly agree with the following statement: “Our church has a clear mission and a strong purpose that is rooted in the love of Christ and the Good News of His Death and Resurrection.”<sup>62</sup> If this purpose is superseded by anything else, then it is fair to state that the church has lost sight of its mission and is at risk of failure. It is not doing its job and, therefore, will not have the same power to survive as a church that is fulfilling its earthly duties; namely to serve God by spreading the Good News of Christ.

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<sup>59</sup> Garry Willis, *Head and Heart* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), 39.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 52.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 59.

<sup>62</sup> Christian A. Schwarz, “Natural Church Development” (Carol Stream, IL, ChurchSmart Resources, 1996).



### Deeply Held Passion for God

Another characteristic of functioning churches is a genuine and deep passion for God.

While this might seem obvious a cliché, a remarkably large number of churches have lost their vigor for Christ. “They go through the prescribed motions, but their hearts are not centered on God and Christ’s sacrifice.”<sup>63</sup> Philippians 3:7-11 reads:

But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

This passage is a great example of the level of passion Christ requires and expects His followers to have for Him. Passionate Christians create thriving, passionate churches; and passionate churches create thriving, passionate Christians. It is a reciprocal process that works for the glory of God.<sup>64</sup> Reverend Johnson states that all followers of Christ have to be cautious of complacency. Christians must always cry out for closeness and communion with Christ and, at the same time, fear Christ as Lord and Savior of the world. “Whenever Christians lose sight of what is truly important and the life-saving and rejuvenating message of Christ, then churches fail and lives are ruined.”<sup>65</sup> “Thriving churches strive to keep this level of passion and vigor alive for Christ and His Word.”<sup>66</sup>

Churches that make disciples who are truly passionate and dedicated to Christ tend to produce people who are overflowing with love and gratitude for Christ and His sacrifice on the

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<sup>63</sup> Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky, *Evangelization* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975).

<sup>64</sup> Tom Clegg and Warren Bird, *Missing In America* (Loveland, CO: Group Pub., 2007).

<sup>65</sup> Daniel Jonah Goldenhagen., *A Moral Reckoning* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002).

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

cross. The members of these churches want to grow in their faith and desire a deeper and more intimate understanding of Christ. “This overwhelming sense of commitment and love for Christ is contagious and affects everyone in the congregation.”<sup>67</sup> Johnson adds, “Our passion will be enthusiastic and contagious to those around us. As individual Christians and as a body of believers who are practicing what they are worshipping, that they are learning what they are teaching. We are not a club; we are the body of Christ.”<sup>68</sup> Moreover, Johnson asks people to think about what type of church they would like to attend. Would they prefer one that is centered on Christ and whose members remain passionate for the redeeming work of Christ on the cross? Or one that lacks enthusiasm and offers a wishy-washy (but perhaps comfortable) message that does not reflect God’s love and Christ’s sacrifice? Johnson contends that, “Most people would, certainly, choose the former.”<sup>69</sup> Thriving churches recognize this and continue to show their enthusiasm for Christ. Time is not their enemy, and they do not lose their zeal simply because they have been spreading the message of Christ for years. Rather, their passion grows and they reap the benefits from sharing the Gospel with others as commanded by Jesus.

### **Focus on Primacy of Scripture**

Another study indicates that healthy churches refuse to sacrifice the integrity of Biblical teachings. They will not lessen the messages of the Bible or try to sugar-coat uncomfortable teachings that are soundly based on biblical principles. Johnson reveals, “One problem many of us face is how to reach the unchurched. To do so, too many people are willing to compromise the message of Christ. We think it is okay to water down the message of the gospel to make the

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<sup>67</sup> Clegg and Bird, *Missing in America*, xii.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, xiii.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, xii.

'medicine' easier to take."<sup>70</sup> He further points out that many pastors try to hide the truth in order to gain new members and attract new faces to the congregation, "However, research shows that this is not the way healthy churches function."<sup>71</sup> They do not give meaningless, watered down sermons that fail to mention Christ and God's expectations for His people. They do not alter the message of Christ and His high demands for His followers. Moreover, they refrain from feel-good messages and the prosperity gospel. Dennis E. Johnson proclaims, "What preacher can read pages like these and not long to be able to preach the Bible like Peter and Paul? What an inestimable privilege to see God's almighty Holy Spirit change people's lives before your eyes through the message of the cross and resurrection of Jesus!"<sup>72</sup>

Instead, healthy churches recognize the challenging dimensions of Christ's message and demands and embrace them, because, in doing so, they are both loving and honoring God. Pastors of thriving churches speak the truth no matter how unpopular or countercultural that might be. They are not influenced by worldly standards and do not compromise the truth in order to please the public. They are not afraid of scrutiny and criticism; rather, they are dedicated to the truth of God's Word and will not be silenced. They teach the Word of God and show people how to live it out in their daily lives. Pastors in thriving churches, first, teach the Word; then, they apply it to everyday living. Without these two parts working together, the church will never grow and be successful. "It is not enough to teach without demonstrating application. But both the teaching and the application should be firmly based on Biblical principles."<sup>73</sup> Nothing can

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<sup>70</sup> Lawrence Holiday Harris, *The Origins and Growth of Baptist Faith* (Spartanburg, S.C.: Reprint, 2001): Introduction.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ From All The Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 1.

<sup>73</sup> Kidd, Thomas S. *The Great Awakening: Understanding a Critical Point in Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 17.

substitute for the truth of God's word, no matter how hard it may be to follow and live out. The truth will always be the best possibility and should be preached with vigor and enthusiasm. It should never be hidden; rather, the light must be allowed to shine in the darkness.

Many churches that thrive have special Seeker Services that are designed to help people who are considering joining the church and converting to Christianity. "They can be called by other names, but they are, basically, an introductory course regarding what Christianity is all about and what God requires of His followers."<sup>74</sup> "In functioning, thriving churches, these services are not neutered versions of the gospel of Christ. Rather, they tell the people the truth, even though they might not want to hear it."<sup>75</sup> Thriving churches are not worried about offending newcomers with the truth of the message of Christ. Instead, they have faith in the goodness and everlasting truth of God's message to His people and want to share it (not a compromised version of it) with the rest of the world.<sup>76</sup> Seeker Services should be focused on the gospel of Christ, and this message should be clearly expressed and taught to the people. It should never be altered or comprised. Pastor Johnson, a seasoned minister at a large church in Seattle, Washington, and Biblical scholar has written at length about the problems associated with Seeker Services. He cautions his audience and candidly states, "Never think it is okay to compromise, thinking you will reach more people; because you will not. Yes, you may get a few more people attending, and that is 'may', but most of the time you will not."<sup>77</sup> In other words, the benefits of

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> G. M .Maley. "Book Review: Church Planting In Uganda. A Comparative Study." *Missiology: An International Review* 6, no. 4 (1978), 525.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Maley. "Book Review: Church Planting In Uganda".

gaining a few more people are not worthy of recognition if it requires a church to lie to the congregation in order to get more attendees.

Calvary Chapel, a mega church that is dedicated to teaching the Gospel of Christ, has been very successful to teaching and mentoring new converts because they preach and teach the message of the Bible, as it is given to the people, without compromise. Their ministers teach with conviction and passion. They have Seeker Services, but on the first day, their teachers warn the students that Christianity is not a “feel-good” religion. Instead, it is a commitment to Christ who convicts us of our sins and draws us closer to Him through repentance, prayer, and worship. Calvary Chapel uses the words of C.S. Lewis to explain the journey ahead to their newcomers: “I didn’t go to religion to make me happy. I always knew a bottle of Port would do that. If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don’t recommend Christianity.”<sup>78</sup> This is a harsh reality that all Church planters, ministers, and missionaries must face; never should they compromise the Gospel to make Christianity appear to be *something* that it is not because that is displeasing.

### **Children Are Valued and Participate in the Service**

In thriving and growing churches, children are not isolated to a downstairs Sunday school class and viewed as a burden to be cast away from the main sanctuary. “Instead, children are recognized for being, perhaps, the single most valuable asset of the church because they represent the future.”<sup>79</sup> Churches that lack children, lack a future. As one preacher put it, “Without a crying baby in the sanctuary, there is no future of the church.”<sup>80</sup> Many churches fail

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<sup>78</sup> Payne, *Discovering Church Planting*, 228.

<sup>79</sup> Payne, *Discovering Church Planting*, 5.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

to recognize the joy of children and their unique and great contribution to the congregation and church of God. The church is a family of believers and children should be valued members of that family. Instead, in many congregations, children are viewed as a nuisance. Their cries and tendency to speak out are frowned upon and regarded as “poor behavior.” This causes many problems; including making children feel unwelcome and making parents of children feel awkward and uncomfortable. Certainly, this is no way to grow a church.

Instead, churches that honor and respect children thrive and grow; whereas, those that do not tend to wither and die. This is not to say that parents should allow their children to act without discipline. Rather, congregations should be more tolerant of modest interruptions and willing to help out parents whose children are making noise. “Sideways glances and eye-rolling should never take place, no matter how disruptive the child is being.”<sup>81</sup> It is always prudent to remember that without children, the church has no future. This is, in part, why so many churches are dying today.

Studies, furthermore, demonstrate that an “all adult” presence in the sanctuary is a clear sign of church decline and death. This is a hard obstacle to overcome because, in all honesty, it is easy to view children as loud and disruptive. “Culturally, we have a natural tendency to expect adult-like behavior in church and other public places. Still, this is not an appropriate worldview to have, especially in a Christ-centered church.”<sup>82</sup> Churches that thrive remember Jesus’ instructions regarding children and know that children are pleasing to the Lord. They remember and honor Jesus’ message regarding children. Matthew 19:13-15 records the following:

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>82</sup> Stefan Pass and Hans Schaeffer, *Reconstructing Reformed Identity*. *Journal of Reformed Theology* 8, no. 4 (2014), 382.

“Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven. And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence.”

Moreover, thriving churches understand and take seriously the words found in Psalms 127:3-5:

“Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.

As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate.” These passages, clearly, indicate how important children are to the Lord. It is pleasing to Him for churches to love children and recognize that they are the ones who Jesus called each and every one of his disciples to protect and love.

One study carried out in over 250 churches reveals that, “Among churches that never involve children [in worship], only eleven percent were growing and seventy-four percent were declining.”<sup>83</sup> This should be a clear wake-up call to all church leaders since children are the future of the church and must be treated as part of the church family. They have to be loved, nurtured, and treated with dignity and respect. Families must feel comfortable bringing their children to church, and need the support of the congregation to help them raise their children to fear, honor, love, and respect the Lord.

### **Sunday Schools Are Active, Vibrant, and Well-Purposed**

Churches that take the time and resources to develop robust Sunday school programs tend to grow; whereas, those that do not tend to dwindle and die. “Some people believe that Sunday school programs are outdated methods of outreach and should be replaced by more adult-focused

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<sup>83</sup> Payne, *Discovering Church Planting*, 90.

outreach efforts; however, children's programs are shown, time and time again, to be predictive of a church's overall health."<sup>84</sup> In short, a strong Sunday school mostly results in a growing church. The children in Sunday school today will be the active members of the future church. Needless to say, they are necessary if the church is to continue to thrive and grow.

History has clearly demonstrated the importance of a good, solid education program for children. "In ancient times, rabbis would work diligently with children to bring them into the Jewish faith. In the early church, monks, priests, and nuns focused a great deal of time on the studies of children."<sup>85</sup> The reformers, too, emphasized the importance of rearing children in the Word of God. For much of Judeo-Christian history, people took seriously Deuteronomy 6:4-9:

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates."

Clearly, this passage shows that God, from the earliest days of biblical writing, valued children and required parents and leaders to teach them the ways of the Lord. A Sunday school class is, precisely, an effective and efficient means of working towards this goal. Of course, it does not substitute for home instruction in Godly matters, but it does help. It makes a church thrive and grow because a new generation is always being trained in the ways of the Lord. In summary, Goldhagen states it best when he writes, "Churches without noisy, learning children are preparing for the grave."<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Payne, *Discovering Church Planting*, 91.

<sup>85</sup> Ray C. Petry. "Medieval Church History." *Church History* 23, no. 04 (1954): 364.

<sup>86</sup> Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *A Moral Reckoning* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 19-21.



### **A Learning Spirit that Continues throughout Life**

Thriving and growing churches are not made up of individuals who think they know everything and no longer need Christian, Bible-based instruction and education. Instead, these healthy churches are made up of people who know that they fall short of the glory of God and are constantly in need of hearing and learning more about Christ and His love for creation. “The parishioners do not see themselves as saved angels, but as vulnerable people in need of God’s constant instruction and grace.”<sup>87</sup> One recent study showed that it was not simply children who needed instruction in the Bible and its teachings – adults did as well. It found that, “One of the strongest correlatives of growth comes from the place that a congregation places on adult religious formation.”<sup>88</sup>

Moreover, thriving churches typically have more than just a single “one-size-fits-all” Bible Study option for adults. In fact, the median number of adult forums available on Sunday morning in growing churches was three, with other options available during the rest of the week. In general, growing churches had options for adult education that met individual needs and did not assume that everyone in the congregation was at the same place in their spiritual life. One pastor explained, “Life-long learning and education as a central focus of the church is absolutely essential if we, as Christians, want to move forward in our relationship with Christ.”<sup>89</sup>

There have been numerous studies highlighting the effectiveness of pre-designed and pre-packaged curricula. Some ministers find them to be unauthentic and relatively dry and mundane.

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<sup>87</sup> Neil Omerod and Shane Clifton, *Globalization and the Mission of the Church* (London: T & T Clark, 2009), 34.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid

<sup>89</sup> Payne, *Discovering Church Planting*, 2-3.

Others find them not suitable for the needs of the congregation. Nonetheless, there are certainly merits to incorporating at least some of these programs into the church's calendar of events.<sup>90</sup> In sum, a variety of adult education programs that focus on various levels and types of Christian education needs are seen in most churches that are alive and well.

### **A Willingness to Welcome Change and Become Modern**

Payne states, "thriving healthy churches are not averse to change; instead, they welcome it with open arms and recognize that, if the church is going to move forward and grow in the twenty-first century, congregations must be willing to adapt to the needs of twenty-first century people."<sup>91</sup> Healthy churches welcome newcomers and keep active registries of who has walked through their doors. Once the church event or service is over and the new person leaves the building, they are not forgotten. Instead, they are regularly contacted and follow-up visits are made to their homes. In other words, they are shown that they are valued and important. "They are embraced with open arms from church members and are looked at as an important person, regardless of whether or not this is their first or one-hundredth time in the church."<sup>92</sup>

Commonly, ministers report "pew ownership" as an ongoing problem in their congregations. In short, this is when a long-standing member of the church believes that the pew they regularly sit in is theirs, and they are willing to be rude or even hostile to anyone, even if they are a new person, who dares to sit in it. This is human hubris at its worst and does not reflect the love of God. Healthy churches willingly allow visitors to sit wherever they like. The already established members gladly, with a servant's heart, give up "their seats" for others.

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<sup>90</sup> T.A. Steffen, "Selecting a Church Planting Model That Works," *Missiology: An International Review* 22, no. 3 (1994): 361.

<sup>91</sup> Payne, *Discovering Church Planting*, 10-11.

<sup>92</sup> Steffen, "Selecting a Church Planting Model That Works."

Before and after church services, the congregation welcomes new people. They make the effort to go to them and say “Hello,” introduce themselves, and welcome them to the church. These small, but simple acts of kindness, flourish in thriving churches.<sup>93</sup>

Additionally, growing churches value experimentation, but are also willing to drop new outreach programs if they prove ineffective. Steffen writes:<sup>94</sup>

"The more traditional you are, the less you will value experimentation. The more successful you are, the less you will value experimentation. If you start to raise the value of experimentation, you will accelerate change and flexibility. The churches that connect with their community will be the churches willing enough to try a variety of things, and who also have the courage to kill them as soon as they stop producing results."

“One study looked at the positive effects of welcoming churches on growth and health. It found that, for a church to be truly welcoming, it needs to do more than just hand out a bulletin with a smile or shake hands during the designated greeting period. Instead, four specific factors of welcoming Churches were identified. They were as follows:<sup>95</sup>

- New members were personally invited to an after-service coffee hour;
- At the after-service coffee hour, parishioners took the time to talk to the newcomers, and make them feel welcome – like they were not visitors but part of the larger church family;
- Newcomers were specifically invited to upcoming events, classes, and get-togethers, yet they were not overly pressured to commit;
- Three or more follow-ups were issued in the following week – these do not have to be intrusive or overwhelming, just a simple card, email, welcome brochure, etc., will suffice.

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<sup>93</sup> Payne, *Discovering Church Planting*, 52.

<sup>94</sup> Steffen. "Selecting a Church Planting Model That Work."

<sup>95</sup> Payne, *Discovering Church Planting*, 45.

Studies vary regarding where, exactly, the line should be drawn between a healthy amount of contact and an overwhelming amount. “However, one recent research project concluded that there was an eight hundred difference between “no contact” and multiple personal contacts as to whether churches grow.”<sup>96</sup> “It is important, however, to make sure that the contact is not coming from just one person (i.e., the minister). Rather, it should come from different members of the church to serve different capacities and functions.”<sup>97</sup>

### **Multiple Services that Incorporate Different Forms of Worship and Worship Styles**

“According to one study, many churches cease to grow once their sanctuary is filled to around eighty percent capacity.”<sup>98</sup> It seems that in American culture, personal space norms make this the maximum number of people who can comfortably fit into a church. Once this number is reached, people begin to feel uncomfortable and are significantly less likely to attend. Basically, they view the church as “full” and think that there is no room for them. Churches that thrive and grow recognize this. They are quick to either bring in more chairs to add to the back and side rows or incorporate more services into their weekly schedule.

Mostly the latter solution is the best because with more services churches are able to alternate worship styles and experiment with new forms of worship. This makes it so that they can appeal to a wider-range of people. Not everyone is comfortable in a traditional, high-liturgy service where traditional church hymns are sung and the preacher gives a short, fifteen minute homily. Conversely, more contemporary styles of worship, which involve bands, Christian rock music, and sometimes long passionate sermons, do not appeal to everyone, either. In sum, a

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<sup>96</sup>Ibid

<sup>97</sup> Steffen, "Selecting a Church Planting Model That Works."

<sup>98</sup> Payne, *Discovering Church Planting*, 34.

church with a single service has to pick a single music and worship style. People, however, are not all cookie-cutter images. Instead, they are diverse and relate to varied stimuli and environments. Some studies show that adding an additional Sunday worship service is the best way to grow a church and help a current church to thrive. It allows for two different worship styles. This means that the church is likely to appeal to twice as many people. of course, if the church can support more services and offer more styles of worship, the better their results.<sup>99</sup>

Also, thriving churches recognize that we no longer live in a society where people work Monday through Friday, nine to five. Instead, people in all sorts of capacities work nights, evenings, weekends, holidays, etc. The church, therefore, cannot operate only on Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings.<sup>100</sup> Studies show that different people prefer and oftentimes need various different options for attending church. Overall, research shows that people with young children prefer early morning services. On the other hand, singles under the age of thirty are more drawn to later services held on days other than Sunday.<sup>101</sup> In some locations, evening services work better than morning services, even on the weekends. Thriving churches recognize the needs of their congregations and, in response, schedule services accordingly. Moreover, they are willing to employ the old saying, “Try a new service for a new season.”<sup>102</sup> If, after the season is over the service has not proven successful, functional churches drop the service and move on. They do

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid, xi-xii.

<sup>100</sup> Lyle E. Schaller, *Rethinking Church: The Seven-Day-A-Week Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 3-4.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 7.

not force it to work or dedicate unnecessary resources to trying to revive it. Instead, they are willing to keep seeking out better, more appropriate methods of reaching their congregations.<sup>103</sup>

### **Substantive Worship**

Substantive worship is another characteristic of a functioning church. This is not in reference to a particular style of worship; rather, it refers to the substance that lies behind the message.

Substantive worship is passionate and powerful. It moves people, and makes them want to worship God with their whole heart, soul, and mind. This can be done in a variety of ways. It is not the type of music that matters; it is the heart and passion that is behind the music and message. It requires the worship leader to be there for one reason and one alone – namely to worship the Lord. The leader must be dedicated to pleasing God and not their congregation. “When the leader’s mind and heart is set on God, then the impact of worship will be great. The leader sets the tone for the rest of the congregation and helps to align everyone’s minds and hearts with that of Christ.”<sup>104</sup>

Makin, a Pastor of a Baptist Church in Wichita, Kansas notes that there are many different types and styles of music and many different ways to engage in worship and all can be pleasing to the Lord so long as the leader and congregation have their eyes set on Him. Problems arise when the focus is on pleasing the congregation or making a name for the church to the outside world for power or prestige. Many churches erroneously focus on having the best chorus or the best band in the area. This is based on pride, which is not pleasing to the Lord. Makin adds, “There are of course many different styles of music and as many ways to engage in

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<sup>103</sup> Paas, S, "Church Renewal By Church Planting: The Significance Of Church Planting For The Future Of Christianity In Europe," *Theology Today* 68, no. 4 (2012), 467.

<sup>104</sup> Lyle E. Schaller. 1992. *Rethinking Church: The Seven-Day-A-Week Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press), 12.

worship. Each denomination has its distinctions and variations and there are all the new contemporary ways that keep coming out.”<sup>105</sup> He argues that all are fine, so long as they are being engaged and used for the glory of God. Makin also suggests having several, different services to better serve the congregation. One service might be more traditional and the other contemporary. Both are equally pleasing to the Lord. Yet, by catering to different styles of worship, different segments of the population will have their needs met.<sup>106</sup> This is an act of love because it is puts the needs and wants of others first. By acknowledging that different people communicate with God in different ways, the church can meet the needs of a wider range of people and, thereby, grow.

The main focus of Substantive worship is expressing one’s love, passion, and dedication to Christ, and recognizing His great sacrifice on the cross for all of humankind. Impact worship is a time when people can pour out their hearts and souls to the Lord and express their love, praise, and gratitude for his sacrifice for each and every sinner. The music does not matter, but the message and object of worship does. The object, of course, should be Christ and not talent, personalities, or competition. Importantly, impact worship is not putting on a performance for Christ or the congregation. It is a way of expressing honor for His glory.

Importantly, Substantive worship is not just concerned with music. Music is used only as a tool to express dedication and love for Christ. Impact worship consists of much more than just singing and playing music; it involves reading the word of God, group prayer, confession, and preaching. Sometimes the service also consists of witnessing, prophesying, speaking in tongues, communion, and altar calls. Churches that thrive do not forget to incorporate meaningful prayer

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Nicholas P. Cushner, *Why Have You Come Here?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

into their worship service. They also take time to confess, as a whole, their sins, repent, and ask God humbly for forgiveness.<sup>107</sup>

### **The Ability to Say No**

Thriving Churches tend to be led by people who know how to say “No” in a polite, respectful, and constructive manner. No one wants to be talked to in a rude or degrading manner. People want to be shown respect and decency, and Christ teaches us to do so. However, leaders have to say no and be willing to disappoint people at times. One of the major predictors of church growth is whether or not it is led by someone who can say “No” to current members who are adamant about keeping things the way they are and adhering to the status quo. People who are long standing members of the church should be respected; however, the amount of time one has in a church does not make them an owner of the church. The church is there to serve God and God’s people. “Tenure does not give someone the right to resist change and rule the church. Churches stand up to people who prohibit change, in a polite and respectful (but firm and uncompromising) manner.”<sup>108</sup>

### **A Focus Outside, as Well as Inside**

This is a tricky balance to maintain, but thriving churches tend to be excellent at balancing between meeting the needs of already established parishioners and the needs of people who are outside of their walls. For the most part, thriving churches are very passionate about the individuals who are not part of their church.<sup>109</sup> They focus on these individuals because, in all honesty, they are the ones who may not know the love of Christ and need the most help. These

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<sup>107</sup> Robert Hughes, *American Visions* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997).

<sup>108</sup> Payne, *Discovering Church Planting*, 12-14.

<sup>109</sup> Neil Ormerod, and Shane Clifton. *Globalization and the Mission of the Church* (London: T & T Clark, 2009).



churches tend to do much better than those that are, more or less, only concerned with the people inside their doors. This is due, in part, to an outwardly focused worldview. Moreover, these outwardly focused churches tend to be healthier and to promote healthy relationships because the focus is in the right direction. “Instead of parishioners becoming self-centered and selfish, they become selfless and other-focused. They begin to look outside of their own, narrow scope of vision and think more earnestly about the need of others. Selfless and mature people and congregations are healthy and thrive.”<sup>110</sup>

### **A Structured, Quick Decision Making Process**

Another characteristic observed in thriving and healthy churches is a streamlined decision-making process. Lengthy, slow, and complicated decision-making processes only complicate matters and make it so that little actually gets accomplished. While it is nice to obtain the approval of all or most church members, or at least a number of committees and designated decision-making groups, it really is mostly not necessary and does more harm, in the long run, than good. One minister points out that, if you cannot make a decision in twenty-four hours, your process is just too slow to be effective.<sup>111</sup> Streamlining the decision-making process frees up the time of leadership and allows them to focus on more pressing issues, such as how to spread the Good News of Christ to more people. Christ did not intend for His church to be bogged down with administration and red tape. Rather, these petty differences should be put aside and the time and energy should be dedicated to spreading God’s Word and encouraging people to follow Christ.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>111</sup> Payne, *Discovering Church Planting*, 125.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

### **Heartfelt, Meaningful Prayer**

Beale states, “Yet another component of a thriving church is corporate, heartfelt, and regular prayer and thanksgiving. Churches that grow and prosper recognize that prayer is central to a Christian life and must be incorporated into worship.”<sup>113</sup> John 15:4-5 reminds all Christians of the importance of abiding in Christ:

”Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.”

Heartfelt, earnest prayer aligns one with the will of God and shows one their shortcomings.

Through prayer, the Holy Spirit convicts and teaches. Therefore, functioning, thriving churches do not shy away from passionate prayer; rather, they embrace it. Prayer directs and guides Christians and helps them to become closer to God and His will. Prayer should be done on both a personal and corporate level. Church leaders must encourage people to pray regularly. Billings in his book states, ”Moreover, leaders should dedicate a portion to each worship service to prayer. Prayer is a way of communicating with God. The church that prays regularly will formulate strong bonds with its members and work towards the Glory of God.”<sup>114</sup>

### **Focus on Evangelization**

Countless times in the gospels, Jesus instructs His followers to go out and make disciples of the people of the world. Christ is very explicit in His message. He does not ask His followers

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<sup>113</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2008).

<sup>114</sup> Todd Billings, *Union with Christ* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2011).

to do so; He commands them.<sup>115</sup> In Matthew 24:14, Jesus declared that the gospel should be preached to everyone, in all nations, throughout the world. Afterwards, the end will transpire. This passage states the duty of all Christ-followers. The gospel should be used to show how the church is to be a witness to the world, and emphasize the Christian's obligation to spread the gospel. McIntyre argues that this must be the main thrust of all churches if they want to function. He adds, "How can we, as followers of Christ, even ask God to help our churches grow and thrive when we, as the church, are not doing the very basic things to make this happen? We cannot."<sup>116</sup> McIntyre explains that evangelization is the best way to make a church grow. Today, there are millions of unchurched people. More than any other time in American history, people are not going to church. This means that there are literally dozens, hundreds, or thousands of people in each community that are in need of a church. Never before has there been such a demand for evangelization.<sup>117</sup>

Makin states that evangelization is, perhaps, the most important characteristic of a thriving and functioning church. Unfortunately, it is an aspect that many churches, somehow, seem to forget. It is the quintessential reason the church exists. The church's main job is to win more victories for Christ by creating new disciples. Many churches think that they are evangelizing and creating more disciples for Christ, despite the fact that they are not.

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<sup>115</sup> Terry W. Booth. *Equipping A Representative Group Of Leaders Of Amite Baptist Church Of Denham Springs, Louisiana To Develop And Initiate A Functional Strategy For Applying Selected Principles Of Natural Church Development*, 1999.

<sup>116</sup> Herbert W. Byrne. *Christian Education for the Local Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1963).

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

Importantly, going to church on Sunday is not discipleship; rather, spreading the message of Christ to the unsaved is discipleship.<sup>118</sup>

Outreach and missions are an essential part of the church and Christian life. According to Bracken, evangelism is “Willingness and the action of taking our love of God, and God's love for us to others, wherever they are. We are to proclaim Christ as the Creator and Redeemer of the world.”<sup>119</sup> Bracken recognizes that, for some people, evangelism is scary and daunting. Today’s society does not look fondly on those who try to proclaim the message of Christ. American society is, largely, secularized and it has become quite unpopular to talk about religion in public. Commonly, people say that it is in bad taste to talk about religion and politics.<sup>120</sup> However, when one truly understands the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross, it is impossible not to share the Good News with others. It becomes an obligation and joy to spread the healing and redeeming power of Christ. Bracken states “We cannot allow people's objections and offenses to stop us. We cannot allow our fear to paralyze us from the call and opportunities that lay at our feet. This is simply a must, to which we are emphatically called. We have no excuse to not evangelize.”<sup>121</sup>

Christ calls His disciples to spread the Good News of his death and resurrection. No one can make excuses and say that this is not their spiritual gift. It is the obligation and duty of every Christian. “Thriving churches recognize this and preach this obligation to their congregations. They do not allow their parishioners to hide behind their sense of comfort. Rather, they

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<sup>118</sup> Hunter, *Church for the Unchurched*, 91.

<sup>119</sup> Kavunkal, "Jubilee the Framework of Evangelization," 48.

<sup>120</sup> Kavunkal, "Jubilee the Framework of Evangelization," 48.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid*, 44.

encourage them to break free of the chains that hold them back from fulfilling their Christian duty.”<sup>122</sup>

### **Focus On Love And Compassion**

Smith maintains that thriving and functional churches are comprised of members who express a great deal of love for their fellow parishioners as well as the unchurched. This love and compassion is penetrating.<sup>123</sup> Mark 12:28-31 reads as follows:

"And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, which is the first commandment of all. And Jesus answered him, the first of all the commandments *is*, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this *is* the first commandment. And the second *is* like, *namely* this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these."

Clearly, Christ commands His people to love one another with their whole hearts. Smith adds that, “once people grasp the greatness of God’s love for His people, then it becomes second nature to express this same type of compassion and love to others. It makes people want to drop to their knees, thank the Lord for His steadfast love, and then share this love with others.”<sup>124</sup> This is the most natural response to recognizing the unrelenting, undeserving love Christ has for all of creation. Once this realization is fully felt, there is little room for hate, intolerance, and selfishness. Instead, love, compassion, and mercy consume the whole person. “A functioning

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<sup>122</sup> McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 198.

<sup>123</sup> Walhrisch-Oblau, *The Missionary Self-Perception of Pentecostal/Charismatic Church Leaders from the Global South in Europe*, 91.

<sup>124</sup> Walhrisch-Oblau, *The Missionary Self-Perception of Pentecostal/Charismatic Church Leaders from the Global South in Europe*, 91.

church is made up of people who have fully understood and accepted Christ's gift to all of humankind and are utterly grateful."<sup>125</sup>

Functioning churches ensure that their members are well aware of the greatness of God's love for humankind. They preach this and, in turn, the congregation internalizes it and is at liberty to share this great love with others. It changes the way people see those around them. It makes people more compassionate and loving because they are so overwhelmed by the love and compassion Christ has first shown all of creation. "Sampson states that if you want to know if a church is functional and thriving, look at the hearts and not the words of the people. Their hearts will tell the whole story of the church and its health."<sup>126</sup>

Moreover, returning to Mark 12:28-31, this passage implies that Christians are to love themselves. They are to recognize that they are worthy of love and worth more to God than all the money on earth. If people hate themselves or are unable to see their worth, how can they love others as themselves and see the inherent worth in each and every human? They cannot. Functioning churches recognize this and remind people that they were made in the image of God. They promote a healthy self-image based on who the individual is to Christ and in Christ. "Their worth is not determined by worldly standards; rather it is determined by who they are in relation to Christ."<sup>127</sup>

Smith notes that from his many years of research regarding why some churches thrive and other do not, he has come to conclude that it all comes down to how individuals choose to respond to God's grace. Thriving churches respond by loving and caring for each other, their

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<sup>125</sup> August Neander and J. E. Ryland., *History of the Planting and Training of the Christian Church by The Apostles* (London: H.G. Bohn, 1851).

<sup>126</sup> Payne, *Discovering Church Planting*, 125.

<sup>127</sup> McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 198.

communities, and the world. They recognize that relationships are what life is all about, and no relationship is more important than one's relationship with Christ. What follows, however, from this relationship, is a newfound love and compassion for the great creation of God and God's people.<sup>128</sup> By loving Christ, one learns to love their neighbors and their enemies. When love is put into action, it takes on the form of compassion and caring. People who truly love Christ will begin to act out their love for everyone, and this penetrates throughout the church, and into the community. People want to attend these churches because they feel cared for, welcomed, and loved. By and large, people do not want to be part of a cold and distant church where the people lack the love of Christ.<sup>129</sup> Instead, they want to be a part of a living, thriving, and loving church that welcomes them with love and compassion. Often, people report leaving their home churches because they did not feel loved and cared for during their time of need. Other people make up an excuse for why they leave but, in reality, they are motivated to find a new church because of a lack of love in their previous one. This is indicative of a failing church; whereas, a thriving church is one that shows unending love and hospitality toward new and old members.<sup>130</sup>

### **A Focus on Leadership Development**

Leadership development oftentimes is overlooked in churches because there is so much focus on other areas of church life; however, it is essential for all churches to work on developing strong, knowledgeable, leaders for Christ. Everyone has a gift to bring to the church and everyone can be a leader in some form.<sup>131</sup> Ephesians 4:11-13 states:

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<sup>128</sup> Kavunkal, "Jubilee the Framework of Evangelization," 48.

<sup>129</sup> Payne, *Discovering Church Planting*, 127.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 198.

“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ:”

Leaders are recognized by their ability to lead; in a church, a leader should be able to lead people to Christ and help them to form a stronger, more personal relationship with Christ.<sup>132</sup>

Leaders in the church are not political leaders. They are not charismatic people; nor are they individuals who are put into a certain position. Instead, they are people who have a close relationship to Christ and are able to help others foster this same type of relationship with their Lord. “Functional churches create leaders who seek God’s heart and not power, recognition, or prestige. They try to discern what is best for the church and are not easily swayed toward complacency. Their actions are directed toward honoring and worshipping Christ, and not towards appealing to the world and worldly concerns.”<sup>133</sup>

“It is up to the congregation – the body of Christ – to recognize authentic and genuine leadership and to support leaders who demonstrate it, even if their message is unpopular or hard to hear. So long as it is rooted in biblical teachings, and focused on the love of Christ for all people, then it should be respected and heard.”<sup>134</sup> Remember, it was the men who went to David at Ziklag and told him that he should be king who supported David's appointment to this position. Had these men of God not recognized true leadership, David might never have been King. “These men recognized that it was David and not Saul who was chosen by God to lead Israel. Their faith made it so that Israel had the best possible human king.”<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Kavunkal, "Jubilee the Framework of Evangelization," 48.

<sup>133</sup> Payne, *Discovering Church Planting*, 129.

<sup>134</sup> Walhrisch-Oblau, *The Missionary Self-Perception of Pentecostal/Charismatic Church Leaders from the Global South in Europe*, 99.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*, 102.



Finally, functional churches create leaders who are able to make new leaders. They can identify other people who possess the skills necessary to lead people toward a deeper relationship with Christ, and are willing to tutor and train them. "Some functional churches even have a disciple training meeting once a week designed specifically for mentoring new leaders. This helps to ensure that the church is constantly grooming new people to take over leadership positions and recognizing natural, God-given talents."<sup>136</sup>

### **Obsession with the Gospel**

The gospel is centered on three main events – the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.<sup>137</sup> The gospel offers a message of salvation from sin through the work of Christ on the cross. It shows that Jesus has overcome death and sin and people are no longer bound by the power of sin. Instead, all who believe in Christ and accept His sacrifice are forgiven and in communion with God. "This should be the central message preached to all. Not surprisingly, churches which thrive dedicate a great deal of their efforts to focusing on this message, and sermons are centered on this overarching message of Christ."<sup>138</sup>

Moreover, churches that thrive gear their teachings toward the Gospel's message that Jesus is truth and righteousness personified. Therefore, the words Jesus spoke and the deeds Jesus completed should be taken as truth and believed, fully and heartily. Successful churches provide their members with a solid understanding of the Gospel and keep preaching and teaching it. They do not settle for a watered down sermon that is not focused on Christ. All sermons, in one way or another, should glorify the redeeming and saving power of Christ crucified. Studies indicate that

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<sup>136</sup> McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 198.

<sup>137</sup> Kavunkal, "Jubilee the Framework of Evangelization," 48.

<sup>138</sup> Payne, *Discovering Church Planting*, 96.

the churches which grow and live out the Christian message recognize the redeeming power of the Gospel message. Smith notes, “Among churches that appear to be thriving, I have noticed a common obsession for talking about Christ's redemptive work. Rather than discussing sports or politics, during breaks or lunch people discussed Christ's finished work.”<sup>139</sup> In other words, they become overtaken with love and joy for Christ and His message.

### **Diverse Membership**

Churches that thrive are made up of diverse members who all bring their own unique talents and gifts to the greater congregation. The church is described as the body of Christ, with various members fulfilling distinct, yet equally important, functions. These functions are gifts, given by God to God's people, and all work together for the good of the church. While there is a head on a body, which is in charge of making the decisions and doing the mental activities, it cannot survive and thrive without a body. Therefore, the head and the body are both important, just like the church leaders and the congregation members are equally important. It takes both to ensure that the church is healthy and well. “Thriving churches recognize this and make sure that all people know their significance and are working in unison for the glory of God.”<sup>140</sup>

Even in disciplinary matters, the head and the body of the church both play a role. While it might be the job of the church leader or elders to apportion disciplinary measures, it is the job of the congregation to uphold these measures and ensure that the discipline is fulfilled. The congregation sets the tone for what is permissible and what is not.” If the elders provide disciplinary measure to an individual who commits adultery, but the congregation does not

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<sup>139</sup> Payne, *Discovering Church Planting*, 96.

<sup>140</sup> Schillebeeckx, *The Mission of the Church*, chapter 1.

support the measure, the entire church suffers. It is the diverse roles of each member in the church, working together, that ensures the church thrives.”<sup>141</sup>

Moreover, all gifts should be recognized as significant and important, and no single gift should be lauded more than others. Too often, churches that fail will elevate one gift (a great voice, instrumental talent, or prophesying) over the other gifts. This is problematic because it goes against scripture and it drives wedges between church members. Additionally, it supports a false idea that some people are more valuable than others. This is not true and is completely against the teachings of Christ.<sup>142</sup> Instead, everyone is of equal importance in the eyes of God, regardless of what their spiritual gifts might be.

Finally, churches with a diverse congregation can weather storms better than those with a homogenous congregation. Problems will arise and disagreements will be had. By having a wide range of people, with different skills, to help sort out the problems and deal with controversy, these problems tend to be stopped very quickly so that the church, as a whole, can move on. Without different problem solving skills, it is sometimes difficult to find appropriate solutions to problems when they arise. These are just some of the ways diversity helps a church to thrive.<sup>143</sup>

### **A Close Congregation that Loves One Another**

Sadly, many churches are made up of members who do not even like, let alone love one another. Of course, there will always be differences in opinions; however, churches that thrive are made up of people who are willing to look and work past their differences out of love for each other and Christ. The church body must be the central core group of friends in the life of a

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Schillebeeckx, *The Mission of the Church*, chapter 1.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

church member. This is not to say that people cannot have friends outside of their church, but their best and closest friends should be within the church. In the book of Acts, it states that early Christian believers were together and had all things in common. They engaged in daily worship. “Today, this is not always possible; however, thriving churches do tend to have members who are deeply committed to one another and want to do things outside of the church with one another.”<sup>144</sup>

”Moreover, thriving churches recognize that they have a special obligation to prioritize the needs of the members of their congregation.”<sup>145</sup> Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, tells the members of this church to do good to all people, but especially to those of the household of faith. Jesus, also, speaks to this obligation when he promised that the church would be a family for the lonely or those alienated for His sake. Oftentimes, churches tend to put new members on a pedestal at the expense of meeting the needs of old, faithful members. All members should be treated equally and with love and compassion. No one should receive more attention than others. “Instead, thriving churches are made up of members who earnestly strive to show love, compassion, and thanksgiving for each and every member.”<sup>146</sup>

“Thriving churches have fellowship with one another on days other than Sunday. These times of fellowship are used for the following: to support one another and help each other get through tough times, challenges, and obstacles, as shown in 1 Thessalonians 5:14; to exhort one another in Christian love, as testified to in Hebrews 3:13 and 10:24-25; to pray, earnestly and often, with and for one another, as described in James 5:16;

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<sup>144</sup> Schillebeeckx, *The Mission of the Church*, chapter 1.

<sup>145</sup> Schaller, *Rethinking Church: The Seven-Day-A-Week Church*.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

to comfort one another in times of trial, especially during illness and the death of loved ones, as witnessed in 2 Corinthians 1:4; to rejoice and celebrate with one another during times of praise and thanksgiving, as stated in Romans 12:15; and to weep and lament, communally, with one another for individual and corporate losses, sins, or turnings from God and His goodness, as testified to in Romans 12:15<sup>147</sup>. In other words, the church's mission and purpose does not begin and end on Sunday morning. Instead, it extends throughout the week and influences all aspects of its community and members lives. Only through following an all-encompassing structure can a church be pleasing to the Lord and serve Him.

### **Forgiving Hearts**

Thriving churches share with one another the grace freely given by God to His people. They are quick to forgive the faults and misdoings of their fellow church members and do not hold grudges. They recognize that God is pleased when His people show the same grace to one another. McMillan sadly states that, "I have seen a few churches who were very harsh with one another. The members were unforgiving and relentless. They always fail."<sup>148</sup> Instead, healthy churches protect themselves from such judgmental and unforgiving behavior and, instead, open their hearts to God and try to emulate His forgiving nature. Quibbles are few and far between, and once they are settled, the past is not brought up time and time again. When the disagreement has been resolved, it is over.<sup>149</sup>

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 13, shares with his audience the importance of demonstrating love and charity among the believers. In this case, charity is the disposition to judge hopefully the

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<sup>147</sup> Schillebeeckx, *The Mission of the Church*, chapter 1.

<sup>148</sup> Paas, "Church Renewal By Church Planting: The Significance Of Church Planting For The Future Of Christianity In Europe."

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

intents and actions of others and to make allowances for their shortcomings. In other words, to act with charity is to try to give others the benefit of the doubt, when possible, and to recognize that all humans are flawed and have shortcomings; therefore, as members of the body of Christ, we should make allowances and be very tolerant with one another. Without charity, humans are vain, but with charity, humans can be in meaningful relations with others. In Galatians 5, Paul lists strife as a lust of the flesh but peace as the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Instead of promoting strife, functioning churches promote peace and remain in good standing with the will of God.<sup>150</sup> They put their love for God and Christ's people before their own selfish needs and wants and look for ways to honor and glorify the Lord through their actions to others and by caring for the least among them.

Fletcher notes that all people have their faults; it is part of the human condition. While God expects His people to work towards improving their faults, God also demands that His people forgive others. In this way, Christians can live a life of peace and love with those who surround them. Fletcher adds, "Churches that do well are made up of forgiving people. Like any family, there will be disagreements and misgivings. It is important to get over them, quickly, and to have a humble and forgiving heart."<sup>151</sup> In other words, there is no room in Christ's church for people to be unwilling to forgive and set on being right all the time. Charity and forgiveness are key elements of a healthy and thriving church that honors God and Christ's passion on the cross. Churches that recognize the unbelievable sacrifice of Christ will, in turn, be much more willing to look past the faults of their neighbors. By emulating the unconditional love of Christ, churches can serve the Lord and their actions will be pleasing to Him.

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<sup>150</sup> Schaller, *Rethinking Church: The Seven-Day-A-Week Church*.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

In summary, there is ample research available to pinpoint the common trends and characteristics seen in thriving and prospering churches. The trends are, for the most part, focused on love, respect, mutual forgiveness and appreciation, and a genuine love for God and Christ's unbelievable sacrifice on the Cross. These trends in membership help a church to weather storms and succeed in an increasingly secular world where church is becoming less and less important to many people. Unfortunately, recognizing these commonalities is one thing; but, employing them is quite another. The tasks levied on Christ's followers are not simple but require steadfast love, faith, and commitment. There is no room for selfishness or self-righteousness in a functioning church. It is pertinent, however, for church leaders and planters to really take the time to study the characteristics of thriving churches. In today's world, Western forms of Christianity are in a crisis. People in the West are leaving the church – many of whom may never return. In the next chapter, a discussion will take place concerning the scholarly literature of unchurched people.

## Chapter 4

### The Biblical Model of a Functional Church

Christ left the New Testament Church with a distinct commandment which mandates His followers to fulfill The Great Commission referenced in Matthew 28:19-20:

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”<sup>152</sup>

These verses instruct everyone to go out and make the people of the world its pupil. The Greek word used for “teach” in verse 19 is μαθητεύω or mathēteuō.<sup>153</sup> It is not to teach the word in a passing manner, but to provide continuous, methodical, and progressive teaching of the Bible. The word “student” depicts the picture of a person who studies continually and progressively, just the way a serious student does. In the case of Christianity, the main objective for the church should be to teach the written Word of God.

Aside from the instruction to make students or disciples of the people of all nations, it also instructs to baptize people in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. The word βαπτίζω or *baptizō* which means to fully wet.<sup>154</sup> This is the reason why the Bible describes the baptism of Jesus, in Matthew 3:16, as him being fully submerged in water. The word

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<sup>152</sup> Matt 28:19-20.

<sup>153</sup> James Strong, *The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2010), 154.

<sup>154</sup> James Strong, *The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2010), 50.



baptized in Matthew 3:16 and the word baptize in Matthew 28:19 utilized the same Greek word baptizō.

As Christians now teach the word, and missionaries all over the world plant churches, they are doing so with the purpose of obeying the Great Commission, as stated in Matthew 28:19-20. If Matthew 28:19-20 details the Great Commission, Acts 2 provides the preeminent example of how the disciple set up the first biblical church, after Jesus had been resurrected from the dead. As such, this church in Acts 2 is the original biblical model that all Christian churches should be reflecting.

### **The Biblical Model Church in Acts 2**

The Great Commission was given in the city of Jerusalem, as the disciples had been instructed by Jesus to go there. Jerusalem, at that time, had been the strategic epicenter of Jewish religion and culture. People from all over the world were gathered there, although Jerusalem was not the home place of where the disciples originated. Rather, Jerusalem was the vicinity where they were directed to go. Therefore, this instruction exemplifies how disciples should be dispersed out in order to teach all nations. Today, this same process of evangelism should be an integral element of the contemporary church, in order to enlighten people about the gospel.

Due to the fact that Jerusalem was such an extremely diverse place where various nationalities dwelt, Christianity was not automatically accepted and had to be introduced.<sup>155</sup> This archetype of sermonizing sets the precedent for disciples, the future church, evangelists and missionaries to fulfill their calling to teach the Good News to all people regardless of race, creed, color, or nationality. The challenge for Jerusalem at that time was not only its multi-ethnic cultural base, but also the newness of Christianity within a Jewish religious structure. A similar

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<sup>155</sup> Acts 2:5.

challenge is faced in America today, amidst the broad diversification of people and religions, to effectively preach the gospel and spread the message of Christ.

#### Group of Believers in a Local Place

The example given in Acts 2 reveals a group of believers from a variety of countries, gathered together in a local place, for the teaching of the Word.<sup>156</sup> This model is still followed today, as the Gospel is preached by pastors, ministers, evangelists, teachers and missionaries who are called and sent to proclaim the Word in all parts of the world. Prayer always preceded the evangelistic efforts of those believers prior to their proselytizing in a foreign land. The prayers set forth the necessary faith, that wherever the gospel was to be proclaimed, it was already preordained by God. Even in present times, there are always Christians who assemble themselves in assigned places, who fervently and continuously pray for the gospel to take root and grow. From the devout prayers of these existing believers, a new church is subsequently birthed, just as it had been modeled in Acts 2.

Apparently, it was no coincidence that the first biblically-based functional church was launched in a highly-populated major city. Due to the presence of multitudes of people from various religions, beliefs, and faiths, the underlying goal was to reach the masses despite their heterogeneous backgrounds. The first functional church was launched in a place where there were existing believers, but it was not launched primarily for the existing believers. Instead, it was launched with the purpose of fulfilling the Great Commission. The intention of the early church was mainly to spread the Good News, and thereafter, to make disciples of everyone they could evangelize to in that particular location.

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<sup>156</sup> Acts 2:5-11.

## Believers Gathered Together With One Accord

As stated by Myers, the believers had gathered together in unity with one purpose.<sup>157</sup> It was not a mere coincidence that they were there, and they had consciously congregated for the purpose of worshipping God. In the course of their prayer and worship, different languages were divulged, and the teachings of Christ were imparted. The gathering together of believers with such dynamic amounts of faith precipitated the Spirit of God to manifest mightily. The evidence of God's power demonstrated to many unbelievers various signs and wonders which sowed the seed for their own belief.

## Reliance on the Holy Spirit

It should be pointed out that the disciples, in Acts 1, gathered to pray out before the church was launched. This simple preparation had resulted into prepared leaders, who led the people to rely upon the Holy Spirit to give them the words to pray out in Acts 2. Therefore, as exemplified in Acts 2, the disciples clearly relied upon the Holy Spirit for instruction. This was particularly evident in Acts 2:4, where the disciples had depended on the Holy Spirit to give them the exact words to utter during prayer. The word "utterance" had originally used the Greek word *apophthegomai*, which means to enunciate clearly.<sup>158</sup> This sort of total assurance in the Holy Spirit resulted in magnificent moves of God amongst the masses. It was astounding that the resulting utterances given by the Holy Spirit were different tongues.<sup>159</sup> Although all the people gathered were current residents of Galilee, they hailed originally from other nations. The language of the nation from which they originated, was the language each spoke as the Holy

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<sup>157</sup> Meyers, Rick. Acts 2:1.

<sup>158</sup> James Strong, *The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2010), 39.

<sup>159</sup> Acts 2:6.

Spirit had given utterance.<sup>160</sup> This observance amazed everyone in the gathering who witnessed the occurrence. Notably, the people who were not part of the gathering had been amazed, because they knew the people who were gathered were Galilean, but the words they spoke were foreign. Initially, people pondered that those who were gathered and speaking foreign tongues were drunk. But Peter stood out and explained that the people were not drunk, but that it was a fulfillment of the word given in the book of Joel 2.<sup>161</sup>

### Leaders Were Raised for the Church

It was obvious that there were apparent leaders amongst the people who were gathered. Although it could be thought of as an informal group, as it had no name, nor was there any formal label on the group, there existed leadership within the group. When people had mocked believers as they started to pray in tongues, it was Peter who stood up to explain what was happening.<sup>162</sup> Had there been no defined leadership in the gathering, anyone could have attempted to explain to the mockers what was happening. However, no one else elected to clarify the undertaking, except Peter.

The fact that only Peter took the initiative to analyze the occurrence revealed that there was acceptance in the spirit of the believers for a leader. They knew the twelve disciples had walked closely with Jesus while he lived on earth. As such, the believers understood that the disciples were best suited to impart the teachings of Jesus. There was no written record of the Bible at the time, except for the books of Isaiah, which were existent at that time but were not

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<sup>160</sup> Acts 2: 9-10.

<sup>161</sup> Joel 2:28.

<sup>162</sup> Acts 2:14.

discovered yet. The disciples were sharing what they had been imparted with while Jesus lived on earth.

Just as in ancient times, the modern times will experience leaders used for the purpose of leading the church in proclaiming the Word of God. It will require more than a single leader, but instead a team of leaders will be appointed, as shown in Acts 2. As Peter was not alone in leading the church in that era, multiple people will be used to lead multitudes of followers. Peter was used, as well as eleven other disciples. The effectiveness of God's chosen leadership required more than one individual.

#### The Church Had Godly Leaders

The leaders who were there were the twelve disciples of Christ. It took those who walked closely with Jesus to best lead others. Their capability of gathering and leading people came directly from their experiences and training. Those chosen to lead were the ones who were indoctrinated in the Gospel of Christ. This is a very important precedent that is established in the first church. True leaders must walk closely with God to be the most compelling examples of headship.

#### Emphasis on Prayer

An integral part of the evangelization, teachings, and the work of the church is to pray. Prayer is simply a conversation with God, but it has so much importance given that the Bible provides that the Holy Spirit teaches and instructs us in the way we should go. Psalms 32:8 "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye."

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<sup>163</sup> Psalm 32:8

The Holy Spirit could give instruction in many different ways but one essential way is through prayer. Prayer is not a one-way communication wherein man is the only one who talks to God, prayer is interactive, and through the Holy Spirit, God has the ability to communicate through prayer. For this reason, prayer is encouraged to allow interchangeable conversations between God and mankind.

Another reason for the emphasis on prayer is that Jesus declared that the house of God shall be called a house of prayer. The Greek word used for house in Mark 11:17, is *oikos*, which means home, household or temple.<sup>164</sup> As such, it was a declaration made by Jesus, of how the church will be acknowledged. Consequently, in Acts 2, the people were described as praying, and upon ending their prayers, they received utterances from the Holy Spirit in their own unique language. It was to be made evident to the world that prayer was the foundation of connecting with God.

#### Emphasis on Preaching the Word

As previously addressed, the believers who were gathered with Peter had started speaking in tongues. Therefore there were people who thought they were drunk. It was just Peter who had stood up to explain what was happening to the group. His explanation was Acts 2:16-36, in which he had relayed that Joel had foretold of how in the last days God will pour out His Spirit upon all flesh. His clarification of the tongues was based solely on the Word of God. This reveals that the primary model of the first functional church, as shown by the early church, is one that is based upon God's Word.

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<sup>164</sup> James Strong, *The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2010), 176..

Because of the tongues that had so intrigued the non-believers who heard the Christians speak, they became curious to understand more. This curiosity allowed Peter the opportunity to explain not just what was happening, but also the purpose of God, and what would happen in the future. It was an occasion for Peter to explain the sacrifice of Jesus through the Crucifixion, and salvation through the Resurrection. Unbelievers wanted to know what they must do in order to be saved. Peter shared the importance of repentance, the significance that believing in Christ leads to the remission of sin, and the value of receiving the Holy Spirit.<sup>165</sup>

When the people comprising the Body of Christ are demonstrating the commitment as modeled in Acts 2, it is possible for God to manifest in many ways. As shown in Acts 3, a beggar who sat at the gate begged Peter to give him something. Peter told the beggar he had nothing to give him except the name of Jesus. He then ordered the beggar to rise up and walk in the mighty name of Jesus.<sup>166</sup> The story ends with the beggar being helped by Peter as he stands up, and he jumped as he praised God for the miracle that happened in his life.

The story of the beggar certainly displays that a church which believes in prayer and is deeply rooted in the Word of God, will usher in the presence of God. When the presence of God is ushered into a situation, miracles can happen. What is impossible with man becomes possible, as God is allowed to miraculously work in the lives of people. It is important to note that while Peter was the one who had ordered the man to rise up and walk in the name of Jesus Christ, Peter had never taken the credit for the miracle. He was very quick to point the glory to God, saying it

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<sup>165</sup> Acts 2:38.

<sup>166</sup> Acts 3:6.

is God who had performed the miracle.<sup>167</sup> It is very important that present-day leaders of the church recognize that they are mere vessels used by God.

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<sup>167</sup> Acts 2:12-13.



## **Chapter 5 Survey Results for Functioning Churches In NHMBANC**

Today, in American and Western Europe, churches are closing their doors at an alarming rate. Mainstream denominations often are being taken over by nondenominational churches that preach a doctrine known as the “prosperity gospel”. This popular doctrine predominantly focuses on treasures of this world instead of the work of Christ in this world and the coming age. This chapter will look at the facts and statistics concerning a survey that was utilized to better understand churchgoers' opinions of what makes a church thrive and what makes it die. Overall, the remainder of this chapter will detail primary with a research survey of the NHMBANC.

### **Primary a Research Survey on Functional Churches: Participant Questionnaire Results**

A carefully designed questionnaire was distributed to 400 members of churches of the NHMBANC who volunteered to participate in this study. The questions can be found in Appendix A. Overall, fifty-six percent of respondents were male and forty-four percent were female.

#### **Demographical Information from Survey**

The following graph (Fig. 1) represents the reported commitment to the church of the surveyed individual. While NHMBANC has many positions, for the purpose of this study, participants had to identify their church function as one of five options: pastor, deacon, officer, trustee, or member. The following is a graphical representation of the breakdown of the results.

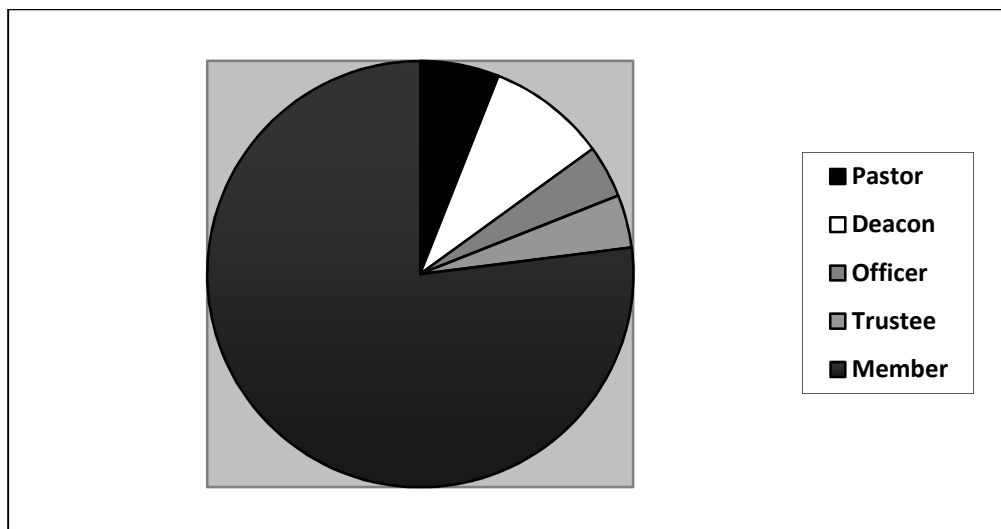


Figure 1. Commitment of Church Members to Various Positions in the Church

Each person surveyed was only allowed to check one box, which represented their highest level of responsibility. Therefore, while probably nearly all surveyed participants were members of the church, if they also held an identifiable position, they were instructed to check one answer box. Consequently, the vast majority of participants' highest level of responsibility was that of "Member." Members comprised seventy-seven percent of respondents; pastors accounted for six percent of participants; deacons comprised nine percent, and officers and trustees each represented four percent, respectively.

The next survey question pertained to the number of years the surveyed individual had attended church. Importantly, participants were told to include any years from the time they were born to the present day that they attended church or Sunday School (if they were too young to attend church). No specific requirements were laid out regarding the frequency of church attendance that qualified as attending church. Fig. 2 shows a graphical representation of the results.

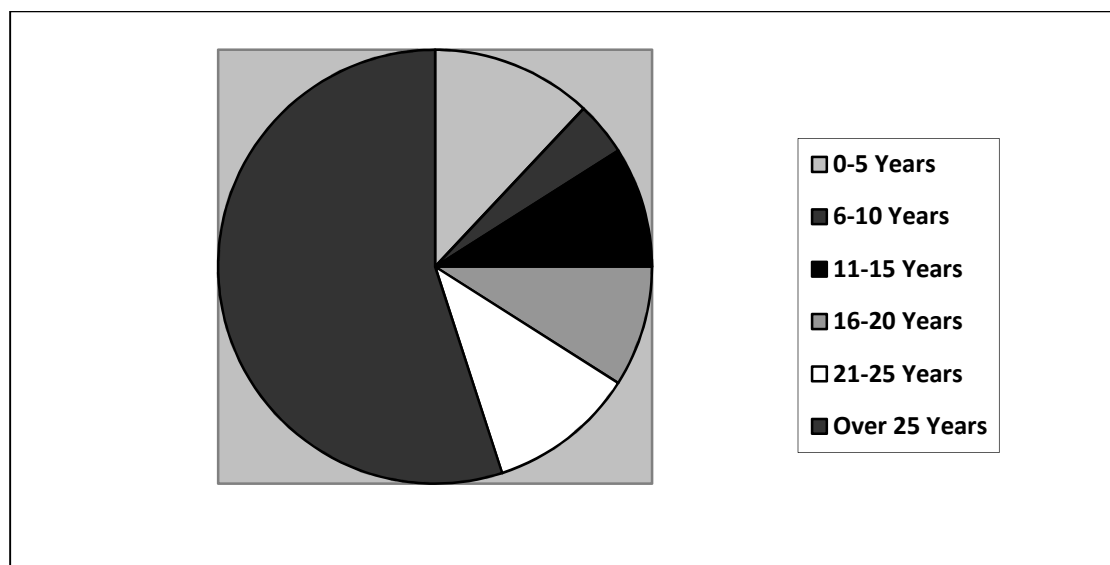


Figure 2. Years Attending Church

Surprisingly, twelve percent of surveyed individuals indicated that they had attended church for less than five years. This does seem to suggest that the church, as a whole, is capable of attracting new individuals. On the other hand, it is not at all surprising that a full fifty-five percent of individuals surveyed had been attending church for over twenty-five years. This is, undoubtedly, representative of the aging population of churchgoers that make up most congregations. Only four percent of surveyed individuals had attended church for six to ten years, nine percent attended for both eleven to fifteen and sixteen to twenty years, and eleven percent attended for twenty-one to twenty-five years. These results suggest that, while the church has managed to bring in new members within the past five years, the vast majority of consistent churchgoers are older people who have been with the church quite a while.

Another factor controlled for by the survey was race. Participants could only check one of four boxes. Their options included Caucasian/white, black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Other. Fig. 3 diagrams a breakdown of their answers.

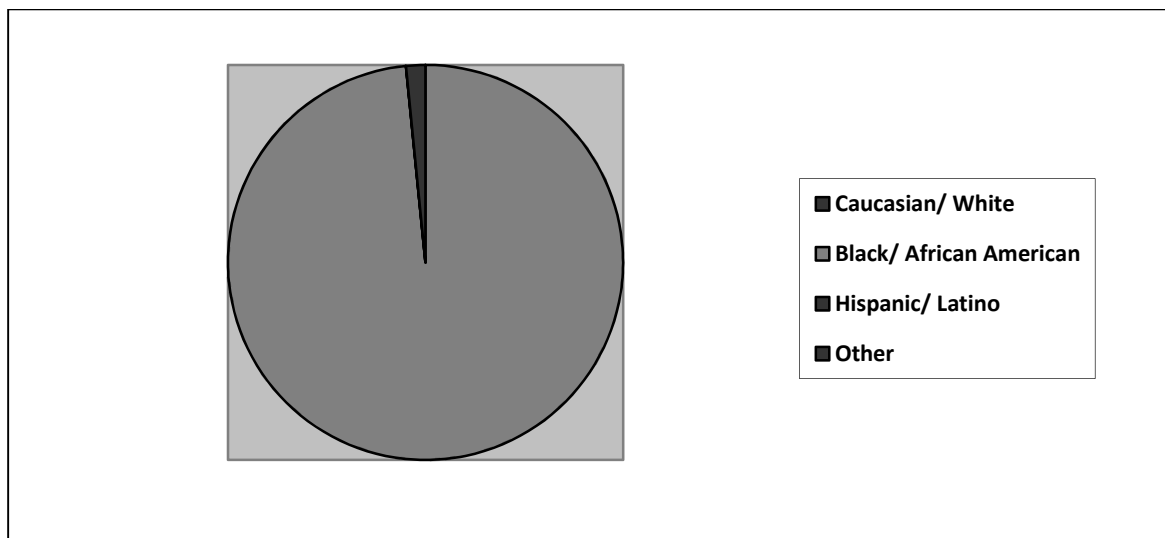


Figure 3. Race of Participants

Due to the demographics of the groups of individuals that were surveyed, the vast majority were black/African American (99 percent). Only 1 percent identified as “Other.” No one marked “white/Caucasian” or “Hispanic/Latino” as their race. By and large, this congregation is not racially diverse, but homogenous. However, this largely reflects the demographics of the various locations of the church.

#### Functional Church Characteristics

The next part of the survey consisted of eight questions pertaining to a functional church. Participants were asked to rate the following characteristics regarding a “functional church” with “1” being the “LEAST IMPORTANT” to “5” being the “MOST IMPORTANT” characteristic. Fig. 4 shows a breakdown of their answers:

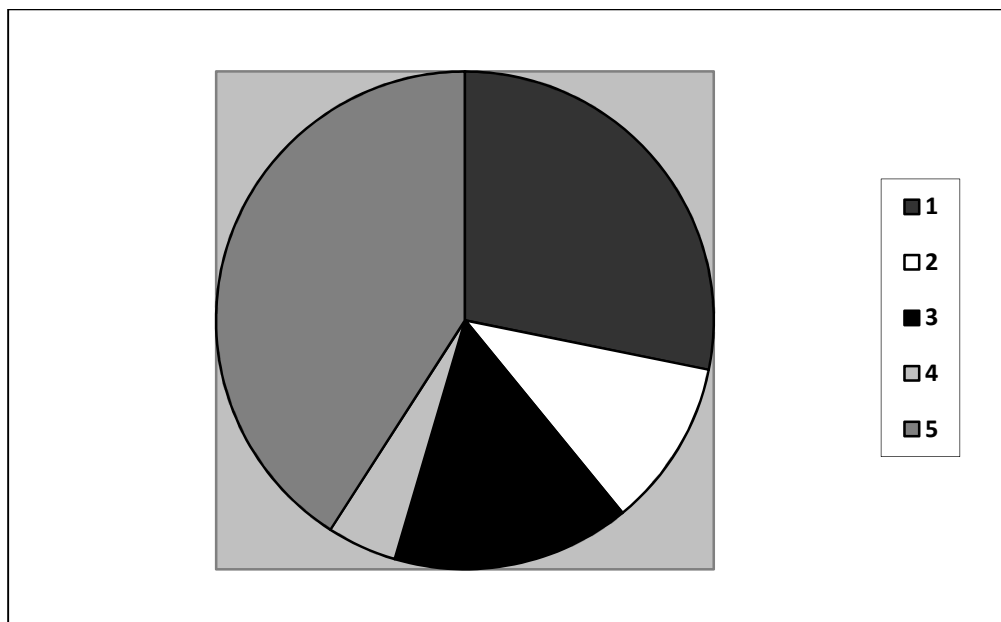


Figure 4. Empowering Leadership in the Church Ministry

Somewhat surprisingly, only forty-five percent of participants ranked empowering leadership to be a most important characteristic of a healthy church (Fig.4). Even more shockingly, a full thirty-one percent rated it a “1.” The rest of the respondents were divided and twelve percent rated it a “2”, seventeen percent rated it a “3”, and only five percent gave it a “4.” These results are telling because they suggest that almost an equal number of people who believe that empowering church leadership is essential, as those who find it completely unimportant. This trend might show why failing and non-thriving churches tend to lack central leadership, as it is not valued by the consensus.

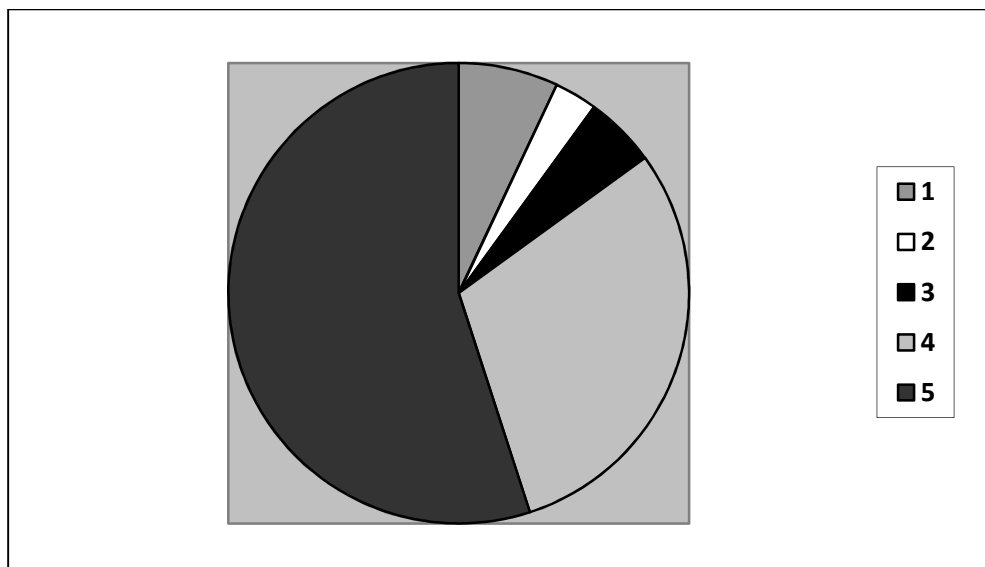


Figure 5. Utilize Your Gifts/Talents to Promote Ministry

This question received somewhat more consistent answers from participants. By and large, the bulk of people surveyed believed that functional churches required people to utilize their God-given gifts and talents to promote ministry. Only seven percent rated this question a “1,” whereas, fifty-five percent rated its level of importance a “5” and thirty percent rated it as a “4,” respectfully. Only three percent gave it a “2” and five percent a “3.” This strongly suggests that individuals surveyed recognized the importance of using their gifts to create a functional church.

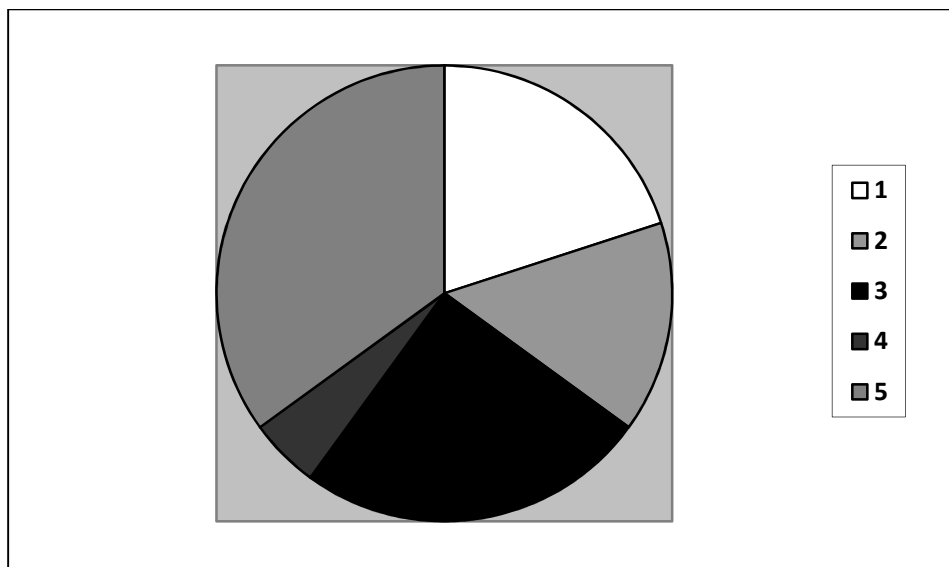


Figure 6. Practice Passionate Spirituality

The practice of passionate spirituality question received diverse answers from participants (Fig. 6). People were extremely varied on their opinions regarding the significance of passionate spirituality. Overall, thirty-five percent of participants ranked this category a “5,” five percent ranked it a “4,” twenty-five percent gave it a “3,” fifteen percent gave it a “2,” and the final twenty percent viewed it as a “1.” Needless to say, opinions regarding the role of passionate spirituality are diverse; however, this may be indicative of the various personal backgrounds of people surveyed. It is well known that some people within the same denomination may rank spirituality much higher than others.

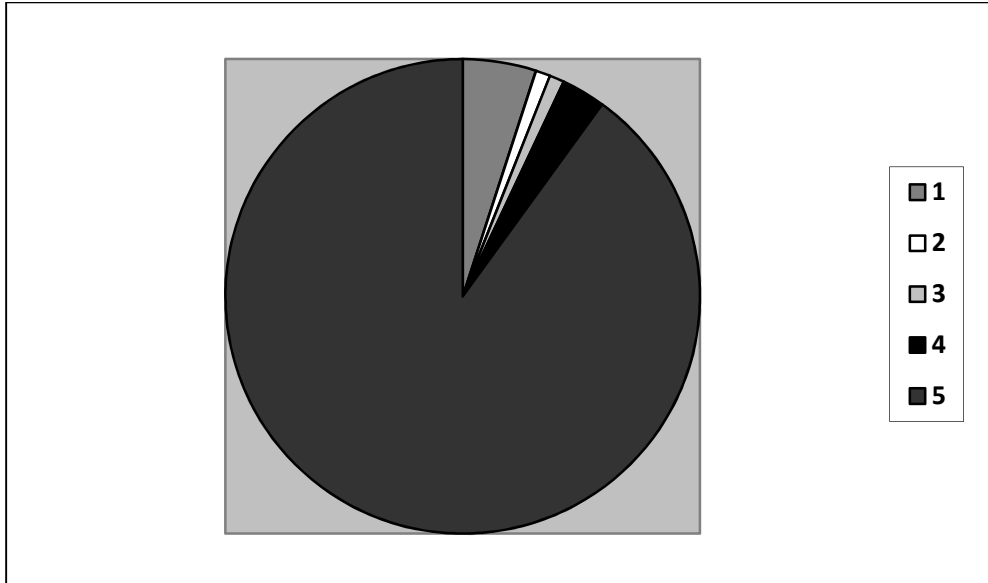


Figure 7. Building a Functional Church Structure

Nearly all surveyed participants ranked building a functional church structure incredibly high (Fig. 7). About ninety percent gave it a “5.” Of the remaining ten percent, three percent scored it a “4”, one percent ranked it, each, a “3” and “2,” and only five percent regarded it as a “1.” Significantly, most participants readily recognized that without a functioning church structure, a functioning church could not be possible. While this may seem superficial, it is a fair and accurate understanding of what is physically and tangibly required to attract members in order to allow a church to function, grow, and thrive.



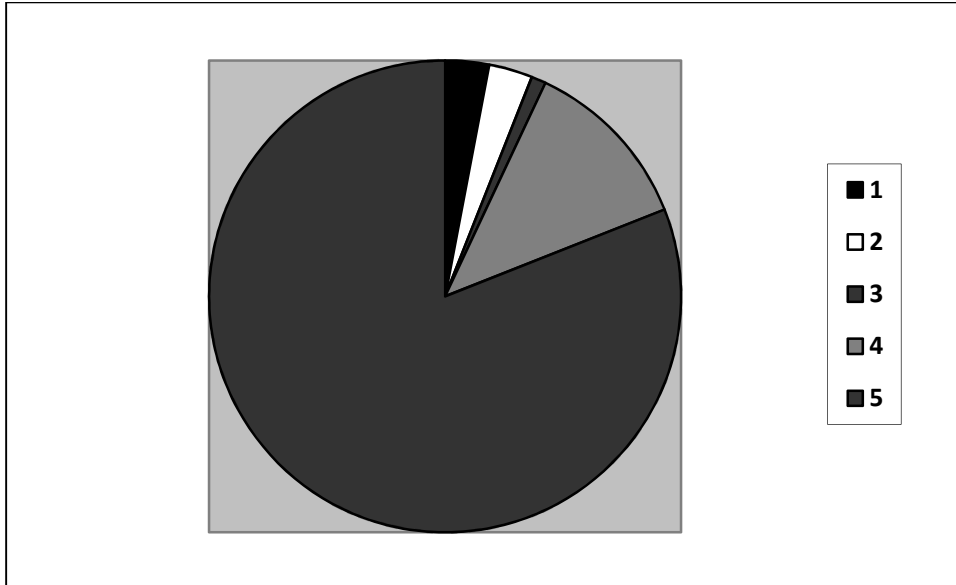


Figure 8. Provide Inspiring Worship Services

Again, a large percentage of surveyed participants fully acknowledged and embraced the importance of providing an inspiring worship service (Fig. 8). Some eighty-one percent of respondents ranked this category a “5,” and another twelve percent ranked it a “4.” This strongly confirms that most people view it as an essential aspect of church functionality. Only a total of seven percent ranked this category a “3” or lower in importance. By and large, people surveyed recognized the life-giving and God-affirming power of a heartfelt worship service.

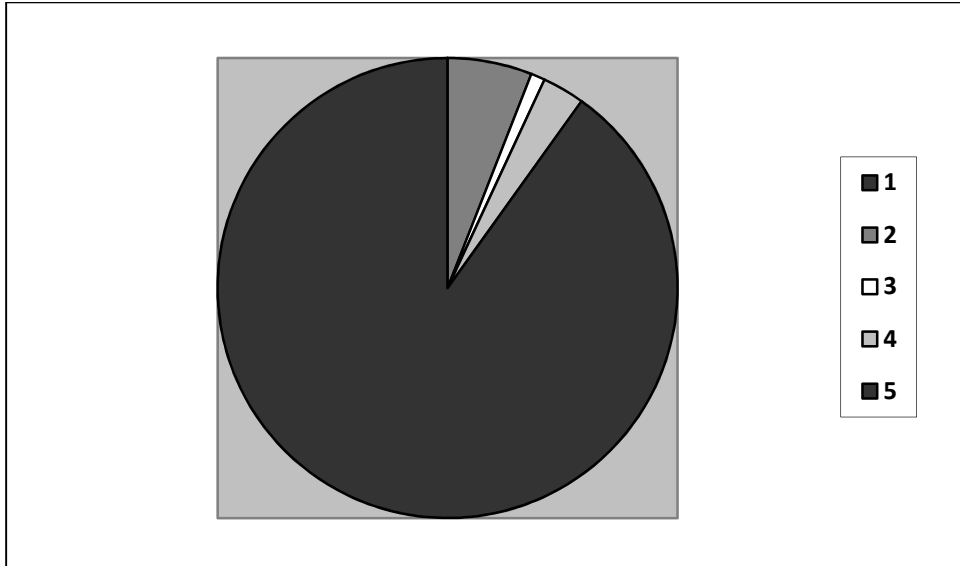


Figure 9. Promote Holistic Small Groups

An impressive majority of surveyed participants recognized that, for a church to function, small groups are necessary (Fig. 9). Not only do small groups add a personal touch to the church's makeup, they also assist it promoting self-accountability for personal actions and inactions. Studies confirm that holistic groups are vital for healthy church growth. In total, ninety percent of participants marked this as a "5." Astonishingly, not even one participant gave it a "1." Of the remaining ten percent of participants, three percent considered it a "4," one percent a "3," and six percent a "2." It is unclear the reason a full six percent marked it a "2" when no one marked it a "1."

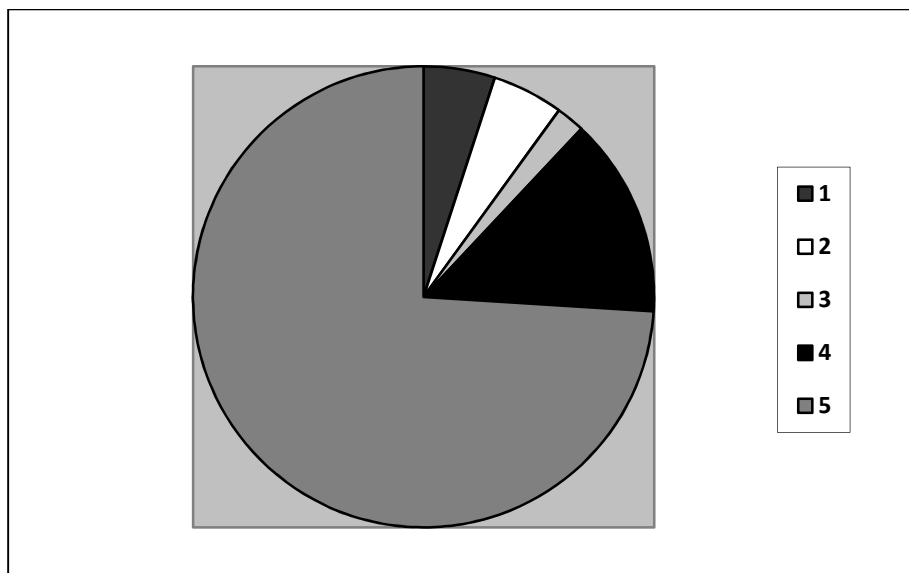


Figure 10. Provide Need-Oriented Evangelism

Most participants, at nearly seventy-five percent recognized that evangelization was a top priority for functional churches (Fig. 10) and, therefore, gave it a mark of “5.” Another fourteen percent scored evangelism a “4.” A mere two percent regarded it at a “3” and the remaining ten percent split their vote between a “2” and “1.” A follow-up study is required in an effort to better understand the reasoning behind why some participants did not think that evangelization was an essential part of a functional church. Given that evangelism is the pinnacle commandment given by Christ to His followers, higher rankings would be predicted should more people should be willing and able to recognize a personal obligation to evangelize. Possibly, the low numbers are a reflection of societal norms which tell people that it is wrong or impolite to impute one’s own beliefs upon others; however, instead of pushing beliefs, it is advised to share beliefs in a safe and respectful manner.

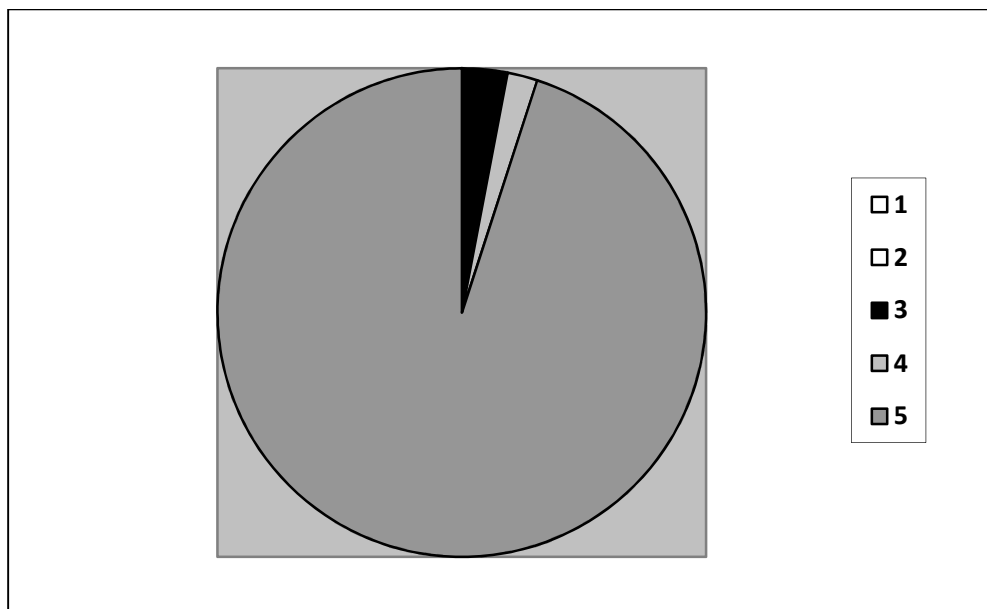


Figure 11. Foster Loving Relationships

This last question, perhaps, is the most revealing of all (Fig. 11). Ninety-five percent of surveyed individuals rated the need to foster loving and caring relationships a “5.” The remaining five percent of respondents ranked it a “4” or “3” on level of importance. Irrefutably, no one considered to rank it a “2” or “1.” This suggests that functional churches strongly recognize that it is their call and duty to love one another as God loves the church. This is a promising result that emphasizes congregation’s willingness to put the needs of others before their own needs, with the intention to foster love, dignity, and respect.

In summary, this chapter reveals several crucial trends in functional churches that, in many ways, mimicked the information found in the literature review of functional churches. For instance, a purpose and love for others and for Christ ranked very high amongst participants. Interestingly, and somewhat problematically, the survey did not indicate that most people recognized that evangelism was a key ingredient of a functional church. Again, this is likely to be more indicative of social norms and standards than of peoples’ genuine opinions. We live in a

society where evangelization is equated with “bigotry,” “radicalism,” and “annoyance.” These results, therefore, indicate that more attention should be given to helping members of churches to become more comfortable with the whole process of evangelism by finding new and innovative ways of spreading the word of Christ that are not arrogant, annoying, or abrasive to outsiders.

## **A Case Study of New Hope Missionary Baptist Association of North Carolina**

### History of the New Hope Missionary Baptist Association of North Carolina

In order to understand the overall mission and purpose of the NHMBANC, it is essential to gain a better grasp of this community's past. Its unique past makes it a primary example of a church that puts the love of God, first, even before personal safety and security. It is from this insatiable desire to worship God and serve the community that the church traces its roots. "This same, overarching mentality has kept the church striving to serve God since its birth 150 years ago."<sup>168</sup> During its existence, the church has ministered to thousands of people and worked toward elevating God's glory for all to see, by spreading the Good News of Christ and making disciples of all the world as commanded by Christ.

### **History of The Black Church**

To understand the historical framework in which the NHMBANC established itself, it is important to briefly trace the history of black churches in America. "During the many decades of slavery, slave owners were overwhelming hostile to slave associations."<sup>169</sup> Lutz in his book, *The History of the Black Church* states, "To many people who were pro-slavery, the mere congregation of slaves – even in the form of a church – was problematic and viewed as an outright threat to white supremacy."<sup>170</sup> Nevertheless, the African slaves relied on their faith and churches for support through these turbulent times when they were not even viewed as fully human, much less equal to whites. They were constantly degraded, treated as sub-human, humiliated, separated from their families, beaten, and even killed.

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<sup>168</sup> NHMBANC.

<sup>169</sup> Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 14.

<sup>170</sup> Norma Jean Lutz, *The History Of The Black Church* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2001), 31.

“Yet, these experiences did not lessen their faith in their Heavenly Father; rather, they took comfort in knowing that God was good and justice would win out in the end. They found refuge in their God – the same God that led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt.”<sup>171</sup> This did not bode well with many slave owners, and one slave recalls the following: “The white folks would come in when the colored people would have prayer meeting, and whip every one of them. Most of them thought that when colored people were praying it was against them”.<sup>172</sup> Many of these slave owners were devout Christians, but many churches in the South still used the Bible to justify slavery. Prayer revivals and tent meetings oftentimes focused on the duty of slaves to obey their masters and the supremacy of whites over blacks.<sup>173</sup> Although this was an obvious abuse of Scripture, it was still promoted and propagated by pro-slavery pastors and laypeople throughout the nation. It is one of the most horrendous abuses of Scripture and a false representation of God and His Word. Nonetheless, many churches still preached this anti-Christian message.

Ironically, many slave owners suspected that slave churches and allowing slaves to worship were too ideal and too convenient for slaves to plan an escape or insurrection. They viewed these churches as a guise or front which would provide slaves the opportunity to congregate and plan nefarious actions. However, the same people who opposed slave churches also did not want slaves or people of color attending their exclusively white churches.<sup>174</sup> Indubitably, the majority of whites in general and slave owners in particular did not want to offer the salvation of God to people of color. Instead, they were comfortable not only denying a whole

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<sup>171</sup> Anne H. Pinn and Anthony B. Pinn, *Fortress Introduction to Black Church History* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2002), 1-2.

<sup>172</sup> Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 15

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, 16

<sup>174</sup> NHMBANC.

segment of the population basic rights and freedoms, but also the privilege of honoring and worshipping The Heavenly Father who had died for the salvation of all, to those who believed in Him.

“Antebellum Black Church milestones were few, but each one was celebrated as a step towards allowing God’s salvation to be accessible to all people, regardless of the color of their skin, societal status, or ethnicity.”<sup>175</sup> The progress towards formulating and maintaining exclusively Black churches was slow, but it continued throughout the centuries. “The very first Black/African American Baptist Church was created in 1777 in Savannah, Georgia.”<sup>176</sup> It is still regarded by historians as the oldest Black Church in the whole of North America. “It was intimately tied to the preaching and life of George Leile, a prominent emancipated slave who preached a Bible-based gospel and even evangelized in Jamaica.”<sup>177</sup>

In time, several black churches were created in the Northern states. For instance in Pennsylvania, many black churches were established just after the War of Independence, and predate most of the White churches in the region.<sup>178</sup> Yet black churches in the South remained few and far between, due to the strong pro-slavery laws, mindset, and worldview. Few Southerners were willing to award Blacks their basic rights, freedoms, or even access to God. “When services were held in Southern states, the emphasis of the message was, for the most part, on the duty of slaves to be obedient to their masters.”<sup>179</sup> Most of the time, slaves were forced to

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<sup>175</sup> Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 19.

<sup>176</sup> Heimert, Alan, *Religion and the American Mind, From the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 134.

<sup>177</sup> Harris, Lawrence Holiday, *The Origins and Growth of Baptist Faith* (Spartanburg, S.C.: Reprint, 2001), 32.

<sup>178</sup> Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 44.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid*, 45.



sit in the back of the church, and serve as spectators (unable to participate, oftentimes, in the Eucharist), rather than participants in worship.<sup>180</sup>

During that time, apparently the church served as a means of propagating the status quo and reinforcing a pro-slavery worldview. Some blacks, such as Frederick Douglass, reported that after particular sermons, especially the more lengthy revivals, that slave masters would treat the slaves more harshly than prior to these meetings. The slave master believed that he was justified in his actions and was ultimately fulfilling the will of God. Certainly, the churches were not preaching a love for God and for fellow mankind but, instead taught their own agenda based on worldly values.<sup>181</sup>

“After the Civil War and the Emancipation of all slaves, the church formed a very new purpose and role in local communities, especially in the South.”<sup>182</sup> These established churches became, for the most part, the only place where African-Americans could find refuge. “These churches, in many cases served to meet the basic needs of liberated slaves that had no food, shelter, or means of supporting themselves and their families.”<sup>183</sup> Suddenly, people who were once slaves and whose families had been in slavery for generations, found themselves thrown into the world without any formal education, funds, or means of supporting themselves. “Due to lingering prejudices and racism, they could not find employment and were either forced to work

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<sup>180</sup> Lutz, *The History of The Black Church*, 102.

<sup>181</sup> McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*.

<sup>182</sup> Donald G. Nieman, *Church and Community among Black Southerners, 1865-1900* (New York: Garland Pub., 1994).

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

as indentured servants, oftentimes in worse conditions than prior to the war, or thrown out into the streets to beg.”<sup>184</sup>

Newly established churches, geared towards the once enslaved African-American Christian, not only provided them the opportunity to establish their own identity, but also to foster a deeper connection with God. As these African-Americans formed their individual churches, there was a desire to organize an association for local churches to engage in corporate worship, ministry, and fellowship. Although racial division existed, there were many compassionate White Christians who understood the love of Christ, and the mandate set forth in The Great Commission, and therefore they aided and supported the development of African-American churches. During this transitional era, the New Hope Missionary Baptist Association of North Carolina was formed.

The New Hope Missionary Baptist Association of North Carolina was one of the first African-American associations founded in the South after the Civil War ended. “History shows that many new churches formed during this time period, but it was still extremely dangerous for people of color to gather, especially in the South.”<sup>185</sup> Hate groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan, terrorized these churches. Not only did they frighten members by burning crosses and having mass protests and displays, they also physically harmed members and, in some cases, murdered them. “Estimates vary, due to a lack of bookkeeping by police officials, but scholars mostly estimate the number of Black people terrorized by these hate groups to be in the many thousands.”<sup>186</sup> Needless to say, this was an extremely dangerous time for people of color to

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>185</sup> Nell Irvin Painter, *Creating Black Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>186</sup> Donald G. Nieman, *Church and Community among Black Southerners, 1865-1900* (New York: Garland Pub., 1994).

gather together to worship God. In the North, black religious leaders and churches were much more common than in the South. As stated, Black churches had been established in the North since before the time of the Civil War. It was even common for Northern churches to have mixed congregations, particularly in the Baptist and Methodist faiths. While racism and prejudice was as prevalent in the North as well as the South, the level of demonstrated hatred was much worse in the South. This was, in part, due to the humiliation the South felt after the war, and the deterioration of its primary economic resources, namely slaves. Even though the Civil War had, legally, guaranteed Blacks their liberty and freedom, they still faced many challenges and unbelievable hostility and vengeance from former slave owners and society, at large.<sup>187</sup> Yet, despite these legitimate fears and preoccupations, Black churches thrived and continued to draw in new members and offer aid to the destitute, all in the name of Jesus Christ.

“Between the end of 1865 and the beginning of 1866, the NHMBANC was first formally organized.”<sup>188</sup> It operated under the basic structure of Southern Baptists Churches, but was loosely formed, and did not adhere to any rigid hierarchy or denominational creed. “The congregations originated as what were then called “Brush Arbor” groups.”<sup>189</sup> One church historian notes: “The ‘brush arbors’ were built of young trees and bushes covered by small skinned trees and straws, etc. The seats were made of pieces of wood driven in the ground with slabs made from pine or oak trees laid on top of the pieces driven in the ground.”<sup>190</sup>

Impressively, although most of the members had no means of transportation, they would walk extremely long distances in order to attend Sunday church service. Sometimes, special

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<sup>187</sup> Nell Irvin Painter, *Creating Black Americans*, 34.

<sup>188</sup> NHMBANC.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*

events would be held, which could require these sojourners to begin their pilgrimages up to a week early in an effort to arrive. These services were revival-style, which focused upon the acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, the Resurrection, and rebirth. There was music, sometimes speaking in tongues and prophesying, the reading of Scripture, fellowship, and the sharing of meals. Altar calls, too, were prominent although, at the time, the altar was nothing more than a board at the base of a tree or some other makeshift structure.<sup>191</sup> Yet, the passion remained high and people rejoiced in their love of God and Christ's salvation. They did not let the harsh conditions of their existence dampen their passion for Christ, and His Word. Rather, they rejoiced in the knowledge that Jesus was their personal Savior.

The African-American church proudly proclaimed that it was born out of “necessity and protest.” The necessity was, mostly, due to the fact that so many people of color were displaced after the Civil War and had no means to survive. Moreover, since African-American people were still unable to attend most White churches, they were forced to have their own places of worship among people of their own race. “The protest was primarily against people who did not believe that blacks were offered God's salvation because they were not considered to be fully human. Like a mule or cat, many whites thought that blacks were sub-human and were not entitled to Christ's free gift of Salvation.”<sup>192</sup> This message was stressed and, in nearly all instances, people of color were not provided with a Bible because they were forbidden to learn to read. Lafayette Maxwell, a prominent historian and members of the NHMBANC, wrote:

"In 1865, we refused to accept any long, a position of inferiority, but preferred to establish our own religious organization. It was in these churches which started out as brush arbor meetings, revival services under trees, log cabin churches, framed buildings –

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Maxwell, *History of the NHMBANC*.

where we found unhampered opportunities for spiritual, social, political and economic uplifting and leadership."<sup>193</sup>

This is the historical basis of the NHMBANC, and is similar to the history of many other African-American churches in the South. Over time, the church ultimately grew, and established solid brick buildings to replace old meeting spaces, yet the overall mission of the church and heart of its mission remained the same. The background from which the NHMBANC was born, grew, and based its overarching morals and principles, provides insight as to why the church is so successful today. "Its people refuse to settle for anything less than the Gospel of Christ and are willing to risk anything to worship their Lord in Spirit and Truth and spread the Good News."<sup>194</sup>

### **Basic Structure of the New Hope Missionary Baptist Association of North Carolina**

McBeth states in the Baptist Heritage, "The church is organized, loosely, according to basic Baptist principles."<sup>195</sup> There is a head moderator, Norman T. Umstead, who serves as the reigning head of the Association; however, he has limited power and is not able to make decisions without the support of the four other moderators. Each church is given much leeway and control over how they organize and lead their congregations. "Unlike other denominations, there are no Bishops or other orders of hierarchy. There is not a chain of command that dictates how churches are to be run in the Association, or the specific qualifications for a minister. Each church chooses its own ministers rather than having them appointed by a central office or association."<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Maxwell, *History of the NHMBANC*.

<sup>195</sup> McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*.

<sup>196</sup> NHMBANC.

Some of the ministers have attended formal seminaries, while others have not. Some are fluent in reading ancient languages, others are not. There is a wide range of educational achievements and backgrounds represented among the many church leaders within this organization. Some member churches are large enough to have several ministers and associate ministers, as well as deacons and historians. Other smaller churches just have one or two ministers, no deacons, and a part-time secretary. Each church is self-funding, meaning that there is not a parent organization that takes all donations and offerings and, in turn, is responsible for keeping all member churches funded. Rather, each church takes care of its own finances and has a great deal of discretion in its direction, organization, and missionary projects.<sup>197</sup>

### **Leaders of the New Hope Missionary Baptist Association of North Carolina**

Each of the forty-plus individual churches has its own preacher (or preachers), boards, leaders, and teachers; however there are five general officers who are in currently serving the NHMBANC. Their identity and basic information are as follows:

- Norman T. Umstead, Jr.: Head Moderator of all churches and of the Association. Umstead has over twenty years of experience in ministry and has been a life-long Baptist.<sup>198</sup>
- Sherman R. Tribble: Vice Moderator of District I. Tribble received his Doctor of Ministry degree and is a subject area expert on church leadership and missionary activities. He, too, has been in the ministry for over twenty years and is a seasoned preacher, monitor, and evangelist.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> NHMBANC.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

- William A. Henderson: Vice Moderator of District II and President of New Hope Union. Henderson holds a dual position both as his district's moderator and as President of New Hope Union. He has a long history of being dedicated to creating new disciples, preaching tolerance and love, and community development.<sup>200</sup>
- Sheral L. Raines: Vice Moderator, District III. Raines is a highly lauded professional who is known for his uncanny ability to relate to younger generations of believers and promote equality, justice, and the love of God.<sup>201</sup>
- Ernest McCowan: Vice Moderator, District IV. McCowan has been a member of the Baptist church his whole life and has engaged in extensive missionary work inside and outside of the United States. He is well-received amongst the congregations he serves and known for his dedication to mission.<sup>202</sup>
- Wanda Dukes: President of the Woman's Auxiliary. Duke's leads the Woman's Auxiliary and has established a number of missionary projects that are led by influential women in the church. She is a teacher, preacher, and highly respected servant of God who eagerly shares her love of Christ, the church, and the communities of people she serves.<sup>203</sup>

### **Basic Theology of the Association**

The Association has no official creeds or statements; however, it does have four underlying principles that guide its congregations. Firstly, it is Trinitarian; secondly, it is Christ-centered; thirdly, it is Bible-based; and fourthly, it is focused on missionary and evangelization.

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

### *Trinitarian*

The NHMBANC believes in a triune God made up of three distinct persons – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. There is only one God, but three different aspects or persons that are each, in their own right, fully God. While the three persons are distinct, they are of one substance or nature.<sup>204</sup> In this regard, the NHMBANC holds the same beliefs as almost all mainstream Christian churches. It adheres to the Nicene Creed’s basic statement of faith and understanding of the triune nature of God, although creeds are typically not part of the church service.<sup>205</sup>

### Christ Centered

The NHMBANC considers the first chapter of 1 Thessalonians where the servant Paul clearly expresses his joy and gratitude for what God is doing for the believers who make up the Church. “He praises the Thessalonian Church’s believers’ insistence on keeping Christ at the center of their message. The specific elements that Paul identifies with Christ-centeredness are growing in faith, working and waiting for Jesus’ return and the Kingdom of God, and laboring with love and compassion.”<sup>206</sup>

For the NHMBANC, a central element of the Association is to patiently wait and work for the glory of God until God chooses to return. “The churches focus remains committed to doing the work of God and fulfilling His laws. Services are not designed for amusement but to worship the triune God.”<sup>207</sup> The association of churches’ main purpose is to lift high the name of

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<sup>204</sup> Paul Nadim Tarazi, *I Thessalonians* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1982), 29-31.

<sup>205</sup> NHMBANC.

<sup>206</sup> Tarazi, *I Thessalonians*.

<sup>207</sup> Williams, Reggie L., "Christ-Centered Concreteness: The Christian Activism of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King Jr." *Dialog* 53, no. 3 (2014): 185-194.



Christ. The intention is that each and every person in attendance leaves the sermon with a stronger sense of who God is and what He expects out of them, as well as a stronger belief in God through a more close and personal relationship with Him.<sup>208</sup>

Importantly, in 1 Corinthians 1:23–24 Paul wrote, “But we preach Christ Crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” This is what the NHMBANC strives to do each and every week at each and every service, to emphatically preach the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ. This involves preaching the redeeming power of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, and the openness of Salvation to all who accept it.<sup>209</sup>

“Yet another aspect of a Christ-centered church is a strong desire to see Jesus as the best example of God that humans can follow. Christ is understood as God incarnated into human form. Christ was both fully human and fully divine.”<sup>210</sup> It is through studying the life of Christ and then mimicking that behavior that Christians can find favor with God. God desires each and every one of His children to live according to the teaching of Christ. For the NHMBANC, the life and teaching of Jesus are to be emulated by all members. This means serving others, both inside and outside of the church, as well as the larger community of people.

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<sup>208</sup> Garry Wills, *Head and Heart*, 2.

<sup>209</sup> Schillebeeckx, *The Mission of the Church, Her Purpose, and Her People*.

<sup>210</sup> Miller, Paul "Bible: Its Theology and its Relationship to the Church," *Theology Today* 42, no. 3 (1985): 275-279.

## Biblical Inerrancy and the Supremacy of Scripture

The NHMBANC strongly upholds the three pillars of Christian faith: that the Bible is the inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God.<sup>211</sup> This provides the church with a solid foundation from which to lead its members and create new disciples. Understanding all of the aspects of the NHMBANC's beliefs on Scripture is essential to thoroughly understand the belief system of its churches and their basis of authority.

Furthermore, the NHMBANC believes that God breathed the words of the Bible. Human agents were used as a means to write down the words of God, yet the inspiration of these words came from God Himself.<sup>212</sup> Inspiration deals with the basic origins of the Bible. This basic belief finds its roots in the writings of the Apostle Paul, who in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 provides that, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God (literally "is God-breathed"), and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work".

Second, the NHMBANC maintains that Scripture is infallible. This is in reference to both the overarching authority of Scripture as well as its enduring, timeless nature. According to most Biblical experts who uphold the principle of infallibility, to say that the Bible is infallible is to say that it is, "Incapable of failing and therefore is permanently binding and cannot be broken."<sup>213</sup> There is significant evidence in Scripture to justify this position. First, the book of 1 Peter 23-25 states that, "The word of the Lord endures forever". Second, Jesus is recorded as stating in John 10:34-35 that, "the Scripture cannot be broken". In fact, Jesus clarifies this stance in Matthew 5:

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<sup>211</sup> George Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2008), 1-2.

<sup>212</sup> George Beale, *George, The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism*, 3.

<sup>213</sup> Herbert W. Byme, *Christian Education for the Local Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1963), 63.

18, when he argues that not “one jot or one tittle will by no means pass away from the law till all is fulfilled”. These passages, as well as others, directly speak to the idea that the Bible is the infallible word of God.

Finally, the NHMBANC holds that the Bible is perfect and without error. It is totally true and reliable.<sup>214</sup> Jesus specifically stated, “Your word is truth” in John 17:17. This inerrancy is not found only in passages that speak about salvation, but also applies to all historical and scientific statements, as well. It is not only accurate in matters related to faith and practice, but it is accurate and without error regarding any statement as provided in John 3:12.

### **Mission and Evangelization**

Last, but certainly not least, the NHMBANC takes its obligation to go out and spread the gospel through words and actions seriously. It is mission focused and dedicated to making new disciples for Christ. There are countless Biblical passages relied upon by the association of churches to justify their commitment to this obligation. Beginning with the Old Testament, Exodus 19:5-6 shows that it is essential that you obey God’s voice and keep God’s Covenant. If you do this, you will be a special servant to God and will be Holy. You are also required to make God a Kingdom of priests and a nation of believers. Finally, you must pass these words on to your children. This passage clearly shows that people are supposed to go out and speak to all people, spread the word, and keep God’s covenant to God’s people. Later, in the Old Testament, The Prophet Isaiah heard the voice of God asking for a messenger. Isaiah responded by stating

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<sup>214</sup> Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *A Moral Reckoning* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002).

that he would be the messenger that God was seeking in Isaiah 6:8. This Biblical passage attests to each and every Christian's duty to spread God's word to God's people.<sup>215</sup>

The New Testament is riddled with passages that specifically instruct Christians on their duty to spread the Good News of Christ. In Matthew 24:14, Jesus declared that the gospel should be preached to everyone, in all nations, throughout the world and that afterwards, the end will transpire. This passage states the duty of all followers of Christ. This clearly shows that the church is to be a witness to the world, and emphasizes the Christian's obligation to spread the Gospel.<sup>216</sup> Later in Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus appeared to his disciples and declared that He had authority of both Heaven and earth. He ordered them to go forward and make disciples of everyone. The disciples were to baptize them in the name of the Triune God and teach the people all Jesus had taught them. Jesus promised to be with them until the end of times. This most significant passage clearly puts forth the whole Christian mission and agenda.<sup>217</sup> It shows that the community of believers is tasked with developing and maintaining churches which are functional. Nonfunctional churches are not part of the God's plan for God's people. They are not fulfilling the mission of the people of God; they do not bring people to Christ.<sup>218</sup>

The three other Gospels also testify, incontrovertibly, to the importance of evangelization and mission. The NHMBANC takes these passages seriously, as well, and highlights key ones. For instance, in Luke 15:4, Jesus declares that all humans are part of His flock and matter to him. As a shepherd, Jesus would search for even one missing sheep. This passage highlights the

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<sup>215</sup> Kavunkal, Jacob, "Jubilee the Framework of Evangelization," *Mission Studies* 5, no. 1 (1988): 42.

<sup>216</sup> William Foxwell Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971).

<sup>217</sup> Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky, Thomas F. Stransky. *Evangelization* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975).

<sup>218</sup> Abraham Friesen, *Erasmus, the Anabaptists, and the Great Commission* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1998), 25.

inherent dignity and worth of each individual. This provides the church with the motivation to spread the Word of God.<sup>219</sup> Moreover, in Mark 16:15, Jesus ordered his disciples to go out, into the world, and preach the Good News. For members of the NHMBANC congregations, this passage is used to judge whether or not their church is functional or not. A functional church preaches the Good News; a non-functional church preaches what is convenient and desirable.<sup>220</sup> Yet another example of the importance of evangelization and missionary work is cited in John 20:21 when Jesus offers His disciples peace and tells them that, just as the Father sent Him, so, too, He sends out the disciples. This passage highlights the church's main job, and is a guiding passage for all congregations associated with the New Hope Missionary Baptist Association of North Carolina.

#### Outreach Programs: Evangelization

A main thrust of the NHMBANC is evangelization and outreach programs. All church members are taught that they are to be crusaders for Christ and work towards elevating the name of Christ and spreading the Good News of Christ's sacrifice, death, burial, and resurrection. Each person is instructed on their role in bringing in God's Kingdom and making disciples of the world. No one is allowed to shirk their duty but, instead, all members are held accountable for their actions. It is through evangelism that the members of these congregations show, in word and deed, their love for Christ and faith in His perfect plan for salvation.<sup>221</sup>

Most sermons focus on reminding the congregations of the Great Commission that Christ gave to his disciples. Outreach and evangelization takes place on various levels. First, the church

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<sup>219</sup> Goldhagen, *A Moral Reckoning*, 62.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid*, 63.

<sup>221</sup> NHMBANC.

elders meet regularly to discuss ways of drawing more people to Christ. Then, they establish specific, church ministries aimed at gaining more victories for Christ. Some examples of these ministries include the following:<sup>222</sup>

- Soup kitchens that not only meet the physical needs of the hungry, but also teach the Word of God and the Salvation of Jesus Christ;
- Clothing drives that provide free clothing to local area residents; when people come, they are talked to about the love of Christ, the redeeming power of His blood, and provided free Bibles and Christian literature; then, as they leave, they are invited to attend church services to learn more about Christ and grow in the Love of God freely given to all people who believe in Him;
- Babysitting services for the working poor and single parents; children are taught to love God and others, and about the Good News of Christ. This is a perfect time to minister to single parents, unchurched individuals, working mothers, and children who will grow up to be the future of the Church;
- Elderly care services where people from the church go to elderly community members' homes, help them with tasks and basic needs, and minister to them about the love of Christ; this allows older members to still feel loved and cared for by their Christian community and, at the same time, encourages the loved ones of the elderly individual to join the church;
- Campus ministry for college age students where ministers and lay speakers go to college campuses and provide loving guidance and support for young adults who, for the first time, are living away from their families. Also, many ministers and laypeople set up

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

weekly groups aimed at helping students learn about Christ and grow in His love and compassion;

- Men's and Women's Bible studies at prisons and jails, aimed at helping criminals turn their lives around and accept the Good News of Christ; this allows them to experience the love of God and encourages true healing, rehabilitation, and recovery, and once released, these new converts can share in the task of recruiting people to Christ;
- Hosting Alcoholics Anonymous and other addiction-based meetings for people who need Christ to intervene in their lives so that they can regain their sense of control over their negative habits. The groups are very successful and allow people to repent and turn their lives around so that they might be pleasing to the Lord, who is the only way to God the Father; and,
- Leadership development courses aimed at helping interested members of the congregation improve their leadership skills so that they, too, might be a prevalent witness for Christ and His love and dedication to His people.

The following is a summary of the observations made about this association of churches, which highlights why it functions and continues to grow when overall church attendance in the United States is in steady decline, and are as follows:

- The church represents, accurately, the demographics of its communities. Most of these churches are located in working class or middle class African American towns and communities and most of the churches members reflect this demographic of the population;
- It has ample community focused ministries that meet the needs of the local population. The churches do not waste their limited time and resources on ministries that are not

useful to the people in the community; rather, the churches carefully plan out their ministries to best meet the needs of the people being served;

- Members do not focus on the past (although they honor and respect the past); instead, they focus on the future and meeting the present-day needs of those in their communities;
- Evangelization and outreach programs are highly emphasized and much attention is given to witnessing to people who may not know Christ as their personal Lord and Savior;
- Community and corporate prayer is stressed and a part of every service; prayer groups meet regularly to pray for people inside and outside of the church;
- The members are keenly aware of the purpose of the church's existence and are willing to put their own selfish ambitions aside to glorify God;
- The New Hope Missionary Baptist Association stresses that all congregations should stay within their means and carefully consider their budgets; overspending is frowned upon;
- The churches individually and the association collectively have an established roadmap to the Kingdom of Heaven which includes a growth path based in Biblical principles;
- The members have a deeply held passion for God and the churches make disciples who are truly passionate and dedicated to Christ; these churches tend to produce people who are overflowing with love and gratitude for Christ and His sacrifice on the cross;
- The member churches refuse to sacrifice the integrity of Biblical teachings. They will not lessen the messages of the Bible or try to sugar-coat uncomfortable teachings that are soundly based on Biblical principles;
- Children are not isolated to a downstairs Sunday school class and viewed as a burden to be cast away from the main sanctuary. Instead, children are recognized for being, perhaps, the single most valuable asset of the church because they represent the future;



- Sunday School and Bible studies are active, vibrant, and well-purposed; the churches take the time and resources to develop robust Sunday school programs tend to grow;
- The churches are made up of people who know that they fall short of the Glory of God and are, constantly, in need of hearing and learning more about Christ and His love for creation. The parishioners do not see themselves as saved angels, but as vulnerable people in need of God's constant instruction and grace;
- A willingness to embrace the future and accept change;
- Ability and willingness to offer various different services to meet the worship preferences of the diverse members of the congregation;
- Impact worship that moves people, and makes them want to worship God with their whole heart, soul, and mind;
- Constant individual and corporate, heartfelt, and regular prayer and thanksgiving;
- The member churches ensure that their members are well aware of the greatness of God's love for humankind; focus on loving one another and meeting their physical, spiritual, and emotional needs; and,
- Classes specifically designed to create new leaders who can use their natural talents to glorify God.

Overall, the numerous NHMBANC congregations are doing an excellent job of meeting the requirements of functional churches. There is still a lot of hope for other American churches that are not thriving and are, instead, following current trends and losing members. In the past, the church, as a whole, has undergone revivals when the Christian message was threatened. The First Great Awakening was, in many ways, a reaction to a tendency for more and more people to move away from Christianity and toward deism. It worked, primarily with the people who were

already affiliated with the church, but it also changed the focus toward more personal piety. This religious revival set the stage for the Second Great Awakening, which was aimed at the unchurched. One source appropriately writes, “The Second Great Awakening was a major religious movement in the U.S. that reached out to the unchurched and brought large numbers of people to a vivid experience of Christianity, fueling the rapid growth of numerous denominations, especially the Methodists, Baptists, and Disciples.”<sup>223</sup> As shown, the theoretical basis for this research, therefore, is based on the notion that, in the past, revivals that specifically helped church members to become closer to God and unchurched individuals become Christians were very successful.

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<sup>223</sup> Clegg and Bird, *Missing In America*.

## CHAPTER 6

### A BIBLICAL STEP BY STEP GUIDE FOR DEVELOPING A FUNCTIONAL CHURCH

The book of Romans gives a very good explanation for all the teachings of the Bible, even of the Old Testament, which most do not focus on in the present-day teachings of the church. As stated in Romans 15:4, “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope”.<sup>224</sup>

Romans 15:4, explicitly provides that everything that is written in the Bible has been written for people to learn. There are examples of what should be done by Christians, and there are lessons to learn from the experiences of other people who have come ahead of us. By reading what happened to people when they make mistakes, we are able to do everything in our ability to avoid committing the same mistakes. This is all aimed at not having to suffer the same consequences that people had experience due to their mistakes.

#### Being Rooted in Prayer and the Word

There are principles that have been at work since the Old Testament times, and were continued to the New Testament times. The model of what the church should be has been shown in Acts 2, and it has proven that following the principles of focus on prayer and being rooted in the Word had given the church success. As for having godly leaders, it is still rooted in basing everything on the Word of God. By absorbing the Word of God, the disciples who stood as leaders during that time, were able to lead others by the grace of God, to the way that the Holy Spirit had shown them to be the way in which God had wanted the church to be established.

#### Time Spent in Prayer Prior to Launching the Church

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<sup>224</sup> Romans 15:4.

Had the apostles not been rooted in the Word of God, they would not have known the precepts and principles they should follow in order for God to work through and in them. By soaking in prayer before launching the church, the leaders had prepared the atmosphere for God to move through the people during the launching of the church.<sup>225</sup> One important principle to follow is to spend time in prayer before doing anything. This is important because it shows that one is not relying on one's own knowledge. As written in Proverbs 3:5, "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding".<sup>226</sup> Here, Christians are encouraged to bring all their concerns to God. This is done as we pray to God. Next, in Philippians 4:6, we are reminded to, "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God". Although there is nothing hidden from God, the instruction is for people to bring requests to God by prayer and supplication. The word originally used for prayer is *proseuchē*.<sup>227</sup> This does not refer to a conversation that is just an afterthought. The word refers to earnest prayer, which means intentional prayer. When people come to God in that manner, one will see that there will be results. God answers every prayer, it is yes, no or wait.

### Have Agreement in Prayer

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<sup>225</sup> Acts 1:14.

<sup>226</sup> Proverbs 3:5.

<sup>227</sup> James Strong, *The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2010), 213.

Spending time in prayer before doing anything was modeled by the apostles.<sup>228</sup> One of the repeated phrases in both Acts 1 and 2 was “one accord”. There was always mention that the people were gathered in one accord to emphasize togetherness. The phrase was originally stated as “homothumadon”, which means unanimous. Unity has always been of paramount importance in the Word of God. It is important to be united in prayer, because agreement in prayer guarantees that God will grant the request made.<sup>229</sup> Matthew 18:19 provides, “ Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven”<sup>230</sup>.

Prior to the launching of the church, it will be seen that the followers of Christ were in one location, gathered together, unanimous in prayer. This is a principle that will be good to follow before a church is launched, or any activity for the ministry is launched. Such faith revealed that the people were not relying upon their own knowledge and understanding because their intention was to pray and ask God to reveal to them the direction of the ministry. As such, prayers before the launching of a church should be very specific, asking God for direction, resources, personnel to do the work, and exactly how to do the work. When people are united in belief while petitioning for these requests, the answers will be given by God. The guarantee that the answers will be given is recorded in Matthew 18:19. The Christian belief that a believer can rely upon the Word of God, is fundamental. Isaiah 55:1, “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk

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<sup>228</sup> Acts 1:14.

<sup>229</sup> James Strong, *The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2010), 178.

<sup>230</sup> Matthew 18:19.

without money and without price.”<sup>231</sup> This principle is based on the Bible’s statement that a thing is established with two or three witnesses are gathered together.<sup>232</sup> The strength of prayer is believed to be magnified when there are more than three witnesses in agreement and praying for a movement of God. Therefore, prayer requesting wisdom from God in launching a new church is important. All the unknown factors are believed to be given by God, and one will certainly be led by God, if one asks Him to. It is stated in the Word that anyone who lacks wisdom should ask of God, and it will be given him.<sup>233</sup> The request for guidance, wisdom, and direction are all based in the Word. Asking for anything from God is more assured when one asks based on the written Word of God. The written Word of God is the will of God. God certainly answers prayers that are in accordance with His will.

#### Have Spiritually Healthy Leaders

Healthy churches are but reflections of Christians who are spiritually healthy. The health of the whole church begins with the leaders. No church can be healthy if the leadership is not spiritually healthy. Leadership is the foundation of any church, and as such they must be spiritually in tune with God. When leadership fails to walk circumspectly with God, it gravely affects the atmosphere of the church. When leadership has a fervent relationship with God and continuously performs self-introspection, the church will undoubtedly thrive.

Throughout the Old Testament, leadership recognized the importance of the anointing of oil, and it was a significant ritual in the early church. This ritual had always been performed directly to the crown or head of a person. There was never a time when anointing oil was poured on any

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<sup>231</sup> Isaiah 55:1

<sup>232</sup> 2 Corinthians 13:1

<sup>233</sup> James 1:5.

other part of the body. When Aaron was sanctified and anointed, the oil was poured on his head.<sup>234</sup> This has become symbolic of how anointing also flows within the church. The anointing of leadership within the church is vital. The anointing and spiritual disposition the headship, transcends to the body of the church. This is a principle that is recognized beyond the church and even in secular organizations. The example modeled by the leader will inevitably be followed by the rest of the group. In the case of the early church, Peter modeled the appropriate behavior that is attempted to be replicated by present-day church. Peter's model is what is studied and analyzed, and is the standard for all Christian biblically functional churches.

As such, for a church to be holistically healthy, leadership is required to live healthy spiritual lives. In order to lead by example, their personal relationship with the Lord needs to be healthy, so that they reflect the life of Christ to the church. A leader cannot impart to others what he or she does not have. If the church has spiritually-healthy leadership intact, then the greater the likelihood of a productive and flourishing church congregation. A spiritually healthy leader is one who is rooted in the Word, and lives out the principles laid out in the Bible. One will know what roots are in the heart of a leader through his life. It is written in the Word that a person will be known by the fruit that he brings forth.<sup>235</sup> It is clear in Matthew 7:17 that a righteous person will bring forth righteous fruits, and wicked people will bring forth wicked fruits. God will impart discernment to understand the fruits of a person's spiritual state. Being rooted in the Word and reliance on the inner leadings of the Holy Spirit will reveal discernment.

The anointing flows from the leadership of the church, directly to the families of the church, as well as to individuals. It is impossible to display effective leadership qualities in the

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<sup>234</sup> Leviticus 8:10.

<sup>235</sup> Matt. 7:16-17.

church if a genuine personal relationship with Jesus Christ is not in order. When there is an authentic and authoritative relationship that exists between leadership and God, it allows for leadership to hear clearly and to be guided directly by God, which as a result, allows the anointing to flow freely.

It is also important for families to be rooted in the Word. The old adage denotes that “:a family that prays together, stays together.” A strong family unit is one that relies upon the love of Christ as a major component within the family structure. While the order details that the anointing flows from families, then to individuals, the responsibility to stay in the Word is a personal one. Each person is required to read and study the Word and has an individual responsibility to communicate directly with God through prayer. Repentance, salvation, and establishing a relationship with Jesus is distinctive, exclusive, and intimate. A relationship with Christ cannot be mimicked through someone else; Christ requires every soul to approach him autonomously. By being individually responsible for spiritual well-being, each person contributes to having the whole Church positioned to growing and maturing spiritually.

## Conclusion

In sum, this survey and case study shows that NHMBANC has satisfied its purpose as described in the literature and surveys of what makes a church functional according to the biblical church model in Acts 2. Therefore, it is indisputable that this congregation is flourishing and the affiliated churches are growing. It is through a sincere and earnest commitment of the church members to God through the bloodshed of Jesus Christ, the keeping of the Great Commission, and the power of the Holy Spirit that the NHMBANC is able to thrive when many churches are dying due to a significant loss of church membership.



With reference to the literature, survey questionnaire results, and the case study, it becomes clear that certain positive traits and characteristics are readily seen in a functioning, thriving church. The NHMBANC churches serves as a great example of characteristics that a thriving and growing church should embody. It emulates the love of Christ to His people, and focuses its whole existence on honoring and glorifying God, just as the biblical Functional Church in Acts 2.

When the information obtained in this stud is applied, it is conclusive that a functional versus a non-functional church is not only very apparent, but critical in addressing the modern crisis of the decline of the Christian church. By using this progressive biblical functional church guide, as a paradigm, the objective is to assist churches in repairing the dilemmas present within the body of Christ. With a focus on the unique traits and characteristics of functioning churches, perhaps a Third Great Awakening that will revive non-functioning churches to become functional and align with the biblical mandates set forth in the Great Commission. This would be a victory for the salvation of mankind, for the ambition of the church, Christ, and the Kingdom of God.

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## APPENDIX A

### Functional Church versus A Non-Functional Church

#### Participant's Questionnaire

Sex: M \_\_\_ F \_\_\_

Church Commitment: Pastor \_\_\_ Deacon \_\_\_ Officer \_\_\_ Trustee \_\_\_ Member \_\_\_

Years in Church: 0 – 5 \_\_\_ 6 – 10 \_\_\_ 11 – 15 \_\_\_ 16 – 20 \_\_\_ 21 – 25 \_\_\_ Over 25 \_\_\_

Race: Caucasian/White \_\_\_ Black/African American \_\_\_ Hispanic/Latino \_\_\_ Other (list) \_\_\_

Directions: Please rate the following characteristics regarding a “Functional Church” with “1” being the “LEAST IMPORTANT” to “5” being the “MOST IMPORTANT” characteristic.

Circle your response for each statement.

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Empowering Leadership in the Church ministry   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Utilize your gifts/talents to promote ministry | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Practice passionate spirituality               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Build Functional Church structure              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Provide inspiring worship services             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Promote holistic small groups                  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Provide need-oriented Evangelism               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Foster loving relationships                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

(Schwartz, Christian A. Natural Church Development. Church Smart Resources, 1998.)

Directions: Please rate the following characteristics regarding a “Non-Functional Church” with “1” being the “LEAST NEGATIVE” to “5” being the “MOST NEGATIVE” characteristic.

Circle your response for each statement.

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Church leadership does not have a clear vision for the Church | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Church leadership can never be challenged                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Church member(s) is comfortable, but never convicted          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Church members are content with being pew warmers             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Church outreach is never planned or preached                  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

([www.christianpost.com](http://www.christianpost.com). The Christian Post. January 26, 2012.)

## Functional Church versus A Non-Functional Church

Participant's Questionnaire

Church Affiliation (Baptist, Methodist, etc...) \_\_\_\_\_ Sex: M \_\_\_ F \_\_\_

Church Commitment: Pastor \_\_\_ Deacon \_\_\_ Officer \_\_\_ Trustee \_\_\_ Member \_\_\_

Years in Church: 0 – 5 \_\_\_ 6 – 10 \_\_\_ 11 – 15 \_\_\_ 16 – 20 \_\_\_ 21 – 25 \_\_\_ Over 25 \_\_\_

## APPENDIX B



### NEW HOPE MISSIONARY BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

**Make a Difference**

**“Serving to Match our Sociology with our Theology”**

**Reverend Dr. Cornelius Battle, Sr., Moderator**

**2200 S. Alston Ave., Durham, North Carolina 27707**

**(919) 596-2131 Church**

**corneliusbattle18@gmail.com**

***Moderator***

Rev. Dr. Cornelius E. Battle, Sr.

May 7, 2015

***Vice Moderators***

District 1 – Rev. Norman Umstead  
 District 2 – Rev. William Henderson  
 District 3 – Rev. Sheral Raines  
 District 4 – Rev. Ernest McCowan

***Woman’s Auxiliary President***

Rev. Wanda Dukes

***Union President***

Rev. William Henderson

***Secretary***

Sis. Ethel Worthy

***Treasurer***

Rev. Dr. Mark Royster

***Coordinator***

Sis. Gloria Brooks

***Congress of Christian Education***

Deacon Harold Stone

***Musical Convention President***

Sis. Louise Parrish

***Auditor***

Dr. Frank Byrd

***Parliamentarian***

Rev. Norman T. Davis

***Convention Musician***

Elder Roland Perry

***Historian***

Sis. Segrid Davenport

***Statistician***

Deacon Lester Cofield

***Dean***

Rev. Dr. Lafayette Maxwell

***Laymen’s League President***

Bro. Walter J. Worthy

***Usher’s President***

Sis. Gracie LeSane

To Whom It May Concern:

After reviewing Pastor Charlie Williams’ consent and survey form, The New Hope Missionary Baptist Association will grant him permission to use the Association’s Church list for his Thesis Project. Pastor Williams will be totally responsible for the recruiting, contacting, providing and collecting all data from all Churches on our list.

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr. Cornelius Battle, Sr.  
 Moderator

## APPENDIX C

### **The Writer's Prayer**

**Almighty God, I give total reverence to you, because there is none greater than you, in the name of Jesus, Your son and our Savior, and by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. My prayer is for a revival of convictions, repentance of sin, forgiveness, cleansing and restoration of fellowship to be experienced by the twenty-first century church in our world today. I pray that functional and non-functional churches revisit and embrace the Great Commission, so that the unreached soul is reached, the lost is found, the backsliders are reclaimed, and that the gospel will be proclaimed and carried to every end of the Earth. I offer up thanksgiving to you for your mercy, your grace, your kindness, and your all-encompassing and unconditional love. Please touch me and help me to continue to carry out the spirit of this research and the principles of God's Holy Word. Amen.**

## IRB APPROVAL LETTER

# LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

May 19, 2015

Charlie Martin Williams  
 IRB Exemption 2178.051915: The Transition of a Non-Functional Church into a Functional Church:  
 The Great Commission Commandment Mandate

Dear Charlie,

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)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:
- (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

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](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Sincerely,



**Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.**  
 Professor, IRB Chair  
 Counseling

**(434) 592-4054**

**LIBERTY**  
 UNIVERSITY

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