



# REPLANT

## ASSOCIATIONAL REPLANTING GUIDE

When I was in seminary, the focus of SBC associations was on church growth. When I started in associational work, just over 10 years later, my first position was called church development director. In the last 20 years, the focus and the titles of associational ministry have shifted to church health, church strengthening and now church revitalization or replanting churches. With each change of terms came a different set of thoughts, resources and way we communicated to churches.

The constant in the above mentioned terms and titles was the word church. The focus of associational work has always been upon the local churches that make up the association. Whether in a small rural context, a growing suburb or a large urban context, the church has been and remains the attention of associational ministries. This is certainly the case of St. Louis Metro Baptist Association (SLMBA).

It has been my privilege for nearly 30 years to pastor in St. Louis or serve on the staff of SLMBA. The document you hold in your hands is the fruit of those years along with the combined years of five other SLMBA pastoral leaders that care strongly about the health and mission of churches. We call our group the Church Revitalization Team of SLMBA. Each team member was hand picked for their quality leadership in a church of SLMBA and their heart to help struggling churches. We believe churches revitalize churches.

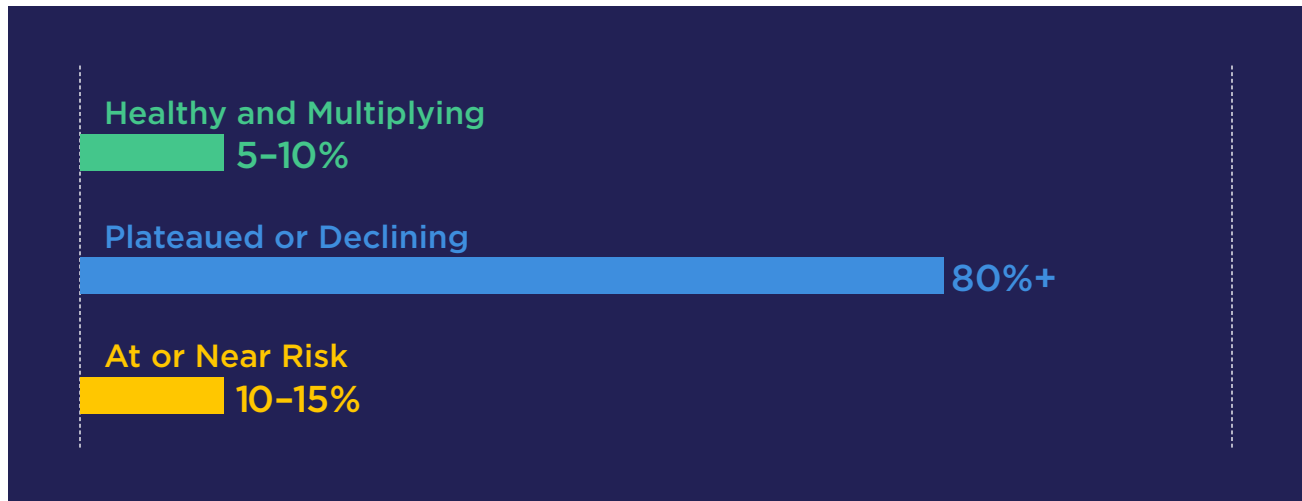
The first task of this team after attending a national revitalization conference in Florida was to create a process to revitalize struggling churches. A process that would provide a clear sequence for working with churches without being a one size fits all cookie-cutter program that ignores the unique culture and context of each church.

The team leader and the person who did most the work formatting our combined thoughts on the Church Revitalization process was Bob Bickford. Bob has since joined the Church Replanting team at the North American Mission Board. As SLMBA continues to use the process, it is our prayer that associations across the nation would be better equipped to help churches be replanted to the glory of God and the good of communities that need Jesus.

Jim Breeden  
Executive Director  
St. Louis Metro Baptist Association

# Introduction

Across our nation, regardless of setting—urban or suburban, rural or metropolitan—churches are struggling. Not all of course, but many. According to the North American Mission Board (NAMB) a great majority (80 percent or more) are plateaued or in decline. Furthermore, 10 to 15 percent are in crisis and facing the reality that they may close in a few short years or even months.



The specifics may differ, but declining churches are generally alike in many ways. Time and time again, congregations continue to gather each week, in a community that has changed demographically, but does not reflect that change in their own gathering.

One finds a building that once was a center for serving the community to reach non-believers, but is now largely empty and stands silent throughout the week, save an hour or two on Sunday or maybe Wednesday.

One finds an aging and physically tired congregation, gathering to sing and pray, hope and wait. Perhaps if financially bolstered by a recent estate gift, the mission can go on a few more years, but the inevitable outlook remains the same: resources will eventually be exhausted, the lights will have to be turned off and the doors will be closed.

In our work with churches like these, we believe that their future doesn't *have* to include closing the doors and turning off the lights. We believe it is possible, by God's power, that a church once in decline and near death can become a vibrant gospel-proclaiming body in the community again.

What's necessary to make that happen?

## **A move of God**

No church can regain life and vitality apart from a powerful move of God. There is no strategy, no formula or step-by-step process that *ensures* renewal and spiritual growth in and of itself; renewal and spiritual growth is first and foremost a move of God.

## **A humble people**

It takes grace and humility to for a plateaued congregation to become an honest one who looks at the realities facing the church with honesty, who stop ignoring the struggles and who give up vain control in order to see God work.

**A group of courageous leaders**

Seeing a church revitalized or replanted is not for the timid or weak. Difficult conversations, bold moves and strategic actions are required and necessary. Often, these must occur in the midst of fear, misunderstanding and conflict. Therefore a prerequisite for seeing these kinds of churches brought to a healthy place, is leaders who are filled with the Spirit, courageous and confident of God's call on their lives to replant and revitalize a dying church.

**A commitment to do whatever it takes**

In most declining churches, the people who remain generally agree that changes are necessary. But that commitment often wanes when the changes required results in having to change something personally. They are happy to affirm the need for change in the abstract, so long as they are justified in their own persistence in the familiar.

**A process and a plan**

Every church has a unique call to live out the gospel mission in its local context. Rediscovering their expression of that mission will require the leaders of a church to work together to discover God's future for their body.

I've had the opportunity to serve with great leaders and pastors in the St. Louis Metro Baptist Association to address the decline and death rate in many of the 135 churches in our association. We've made mistakes, been asked to leave a few times and we've learned a lot along the way. By God's grace we have also seen some successes. Churches who were once near death have regained life and vitality and are reaching their communities for the gospel.

This guide offers a process that could help the churches you are working with discover their future. Such a future brings glory to God by seeing His power redeem and restore a church so more people would know His name. We pray that as you seek to address the decline and death rate of churches in your local area you will find this resource helpful.

Bob Bickford  
Associate Director Replant

## Exploration: Beginning the conversation

By the time a church in crisis calls for help, its leaders are aware that things are critical; they understand that if something doesn't change soon they will have to close. As a group, their feelings span across wide spectrums, from fear to hope, and desperation to denial. The leaders are carrying a heavy burden in trying to navigate the uncertain future of a congregation in which many of them have served and sacrificed for years.

This process is not merely theoretical for them; it's personal, and painful.

In writing these words, I can see the faces of people I've met who are grieving, sad and scared about their church's future. Some come to you hoping you'll be able to offer suggestions that will address their needs—so long as they are suggestions that won't cost them too much, or create division in the body. Some will want things to change without changing anything. Others, however, will realize that radical change is necessary and will understand that it is time to face the dreadfully painful reality: *The church is about to die. If this local expression of Christ's body is going to make it another year, radical action is required.*

Such a harsh reality is a lot to deal with for those of us who have been invited to speak words of truth and hope to a people who haven't had much of either. It is therefore crucial for us to understand that when we walk into a dying church, we are not walking into a sterile laboratory, we are walking into a history more complex than can be written down in a brief manual such as this one.

### Understanding their story

It's been said that the first task of a leader is to define reality. When we are called in to consult a struggling congregation, everyone in the room will likely know (or at least has a general idea of the fact) that things are not good for the church. However, it's *not* likely everyone will know just how serious things are. They must come to recognize the seriousness of the situation they find themselves in, but this recognition must come from self-discovery with prayer and reflection.

So before asking about attendance and finances, it is important to understand the backstory of the church. Typically, every church has something positive to recall from its past. Invite the people in the room to reflect on the days when God was blessing the church, when the pews and the children's classrooms were full. When was the church last reaching people for Christ on a regular basis? When was it at its peak in attendance and its influence on the community? What drew them to become part of the congregation and why have they stayed? Find something to celebrate. Take time to practice the ancient discipline of meditating on God's faithfulness in years past (Psalm 78).

Then, take time to identify the common concerns. Without fail, you will discover that some individuals in the room will be highly critical of the current state of the church, while others will have a far more idealistic perspective; this contrast creates a healthy tension. The critic brings a much needed dose of reality, while the idealist offers hope for the future, and both are usually passionate in wanting to see the church regain vitality.

You can practice this exercise by asking the following series of questions.

#### Question one: What led us to this meeting today?

The main point with this question is to get these leaders—the committee, group of deacons, or whoever was responsible for calling you in—to begin putting together a picture of the true



condition of the church. Let the room sit silent awhile if necessary. Don't be afraid to let these leaders soak in the thickness of the air, they have to be able to recognize for themselves why a meeting like this is even taking place. Once the conversation begins, keep it going by asking for clarity, rephrasing, checking for consistency and truthfulness. Guard against dominating personalities and those who are not participating in the conversation. It's not uncommon to experience both strong emotions and some conflict as the discussion flows. Don't shy away from interjecting as necessary to keep things moving in a constructive direction.

**Tip:** It is often helpful to record the responses to this discussion on a whiteboard or flip chart. Having one of the members of the church write the responses down gives you an opportunity to focus on the responses both verbal and nonverbal. Also, have someone take notes or pictures for production of a post-meeting summary.

It is important to understand the level of clarity these leaders have about the true condition of their church, and to assess their understanding of the severity of its immediate needs. When the discussion appears to be winding down, it is beneficial to ask, "Is there anything else to add before we move on?" It's important to get everything out on the table in order to avoid a potential derailing fact, opinion, or circumstance later in the process, which may later prove to be difficult to expose. Using diagnostic questions can aid in bringing clarity over emotion.

Mark Clifton, national replant strategist of the North American Mission Board (NAMB), has identified several key indicators that a church needs to be replanted. These following questions help unearth these indicators:

- Has your church seen active attendance decline for more than three years?
- Is your church struggling just to pay your bills in a timely manner?
- Has your church been unable to pay your pastor the amount you think he should be paid?
- Are you unable to attract young people and young families to become members and be involved in the life of your church?
- Do you feel that your church is somehow disengaged from the surrounding neighborhood?
- Would anyone in the neighborhood care if your church closed?
- If your current trends continue in both attendance and giving, do you fear your church will have to close within the next five years?

### Question two: How did the church get to this place?

One of the key objectives in this first meeting is to discern the leaders' understanding, not only of the church's present condition, but also of what contributed in bringing them to such conditions. Standard answers range from internal conflict, change in the demographics of the community, frequent pastoral succession and lack of resources.

Often, these leaders will identify problems or issues outside their influence as the primary reasons why they are in crisis and decline. In such occasions, it is important to bring the discussion back to a personal note, in order to identify how those *in the church* have contributed toward their arriving at where they are presently. What we want is for the church to be able to honestly identify exterior contributors to their decline, while taking responsibility and owning and accepting what they are responsible for as a congregation.

**Recommended resource:** *Flickering Lamps* by Richard and Henry Blackaby. This is specifically written as a study for churches to discern their spiritual condition and understand that decline in a church is primarily a spiritual problem. Getting the leaders to commit to an intentional study through a resource like *Flickering Lamps* helps them begin to see areas in which the church has abandoned faithfulness to loving Jesus and His mission first hand. A church in crisis has to come to grips over time with their actual condition and the contributions they made in getting there.

### Question three: What can be done?

This is the question they are asking you, even if it has not been stated explicitly. It is at this point that an important shift in the meeting takes place, in which you will ask them to commit to a process whereby possible solutions can be discovered which will address the church's need in light of its mission and purpose—namely, the proclamation of the gospel and making disciples.

This process is intended to discover the congregational realities. The process utilizes surveys that yield insights into congregational life, beliefs, economic, demographic and missiological contexts in the community and how accurately they are reflected in the church as it is today. In other words, we are trying to answer the question: *does the church look like those who live in the immediate community?* Gathering of data, church history, a demographics analysis and evaluation of the spiritual condition of the congregation provide the information necessary to understand the conditions inside of the church and to make suggestions regarding its future.

We recognize that every church possesses local and autonomous authority; they have both the right and the responsibility to make decisions under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, governed by His inspired Word. Therefore, it is crucial we carefully define our function as it relates to the church. Our role is not to do something *to* the church or *for* the church, but rather *with* the church.

Leaders in struggling congregations may approach this process with fear they will lose the power of decision-making. It's also possible they may be so deeply discouraged and tired of the conflict and struggle they want to yield the decision-making responsibility to someone else. Assure them that you will work with them but they will need to work with you and lead their congregation through this process. Ultimately, it is the leaders of the church who will have to give an account for how they keep watch over the souls of their congregants, not you (Hebrews 13:17).

### Explaining the process

Turning attention to what's next, it's helpful to unpack the process for this leadership group. It's important to take time to explain each step and allow for questions. Likely, there will be some mental fatigue from discussing difficult topics that have thus far been addressed, so you may consider taking a brief break before moving on to this section of the meeting.

### Step one: Exploration

The goal of this step is to gain an understanding of the church in its present condition through guided leadership conversations with key leaders in the congregation. Hopefully, this step will simply be a summary of what has been covered already.

## Step two: Examination

This will be an in-depth study of congregational dynamics, statistical analysis of finances and attendance patterns, facilities review, community demographic research, comparative analysis of ACP data for the last 10 years, etc. If the decline has persisted for a long time, ACP data should be gathered prior to the point of decline. These findings are put into a church portfolio.

## Step three: Presentation

Having compiled and organized the data, it is time to present the findings to the church. We recommend beginning with the leaders, then key congregational members and then the larger congregation.

**Tip:** Steps three and four are usually done together in expanding circles of influence.

## Step four: Recommendation

Based upon your findings, the team walking with the church through this process will submit one or two recommendations for the church leaders to prayerfully consider. They could include any of the following:

- **Church replant:** This is the scenario in which the existing church surrenders assets, including property and day-to-day decision making to the association, denomination or Sending Church. They will then call an assessed and qualified replant pastor, and launch as a new congregation.
- **Merge with an existing church (Campus/Network Model):** This is the scenario in which the church in need becomes part of an existing church, as a campus or network church. In this scenario, the struggling church will surrender decision-making and assets over to the existing church, and will accept new leadership.
- **Merge with a church plant (Marriage Model):** This is the scenario in which the struggling church becomes part of a church plant. The struggling church will sign the deed of property and assets over to the church plant and will accept their leadership in all areas.
- **Close and gift property and other assets:** This is the scenario in which the existing church closes and gifts its property to the denomination, association, an existing church in the area, or a church plant.

We recommend making the first presentation of recommendations to the initial group of leaders who contacted you for assistance. Upon the leaders affirmation (step five), the presentations and recommendations will be made to an expanding circle of leaders and influencers, and last, to the entire church body.

**Tip:** Equipping and empowering the existing church leaders to make the presentation and recommendation is key. We have found that a congregation is more likely to receive this news from its own leaders within the congregation, rather than from an outsider.

**What about Revitalization?** Revitalization refers to a longer protracted effort to bring health and vitality back to an existing church by working with existing leaders, governance and congregation. The replant team focuses on working with churches in immediate crisis that are facing closure within the next several months or years. Local associations and state conventions are better suited to address Revitalizations.



### Step five: Affirmation

After a series of town hall meetings, the church is asked to affirm the recommendation by vote. This is an important step for the church to take—this is the step where the church is officially acknowledging their need and intended course of action.

(\*For reference see the letter in the resource section from First Baptist Church Affton, MO for an example of a church's affirmation of recommended actions.)

### Step six: Implementation

Once the church votes to affirm and approve the recommendation, it is time to begin drafting the plans for leading the church forward. If the congregation is pastorless and is conducting a pastor search, we recommend the leadership team begin implementing necessary changes to allow the church to be ready to move forward once a Replant pastor is found. This step might include: dealing with designated funds, working through the church membership roll to remove deceased, transitioned and absent members who cannot be found or contacted, taking care of facility needs and streamlining ministry and or decision making. We do not recommend that this team draft a ministry strategy or develop new ministries. Changes of this nature should take place once the new leadership is in place.

### Step seven: Multiplication

Churches plant churches and replanted churches replant churches. As the congregation moves forward and regains health and vitality, we encourage the newly replanted church to consider replanting another congregation. This may mean sending people, supporting the work at a church beginning the process of replanting or telling the story of God's work in and through their church as they prayerfully walked through the process of being replanted.

## Examination: Getting an accurate picture

Each of us has the tendency to downplay our deficits and build up our strengths when given the opportunity to talk about ourselves—the same holds true for a congregation, especially a declining one. Assisting the church in getting an accurate picture of its current condition, health and potential future, requires a great deal of both research and relational work.

### Create a church portfolio

Developing a composite profile will require the cooperation of a key leader, or leaders, and those who have access to church information. We have found that choosing one or two people who have congregational authority (i.e. chairman of the deacons, treasurer, church moderator or clerk) to view and record financial and vital statistics as your immediate research team will provide you the contacts necessary to obtain the information you need in order to develop your recommendations.

Securing such an agreement from the leaders during the exploration stage, regarding information discovery, is important, and is likely to be a prerequisite for meaningful communication with church administrators and or secretaries who may view the church information as confidential and not readily grant it. You will need to assure everyone involved that this information will be kept in confidence.

We've found it helpful to create a portfolio with or for the church in Google Docs, which allows those involved to import data and documents necessary for this phase. This practice is especially helpful as you work with other associational staff or replant team members in a collaborative way.

**Note:** You will need to adjust the settings in such documents as needed. They can be set to view only, and edit and ownership may be reserved to one primary user. The idea is for this church portfolio to become the place where all documents and data related to the church reside.

With agreement for information discovery and contacts secured, you will then begin the work of populating the church portfolio with information.

### What are the major trends?

Our best source of historical information is the ACP (Annual Church Profile). We recommend obtaining, at minimum, 10 years of data from this source. If possible, it's even better to go back 20 years or more in order to understand the trends over time.

We also recommend creating a spreadsheet from which you can create a visual trend line for the leaders—and later for the church—which depicts the statistics reflected in the ACP.

As you are creating the trend lines, note key moments in the life of the church. Pastoral terminations, transitions, building projects, economic changes, crises and other events could be reflected in the visual portrayal of the church's slide in attendance and budget.

### Where is the congregation spiritually?

Numbers are part of the story, but they are not the only part of the story. Downturns in attendance and decline in financials are often due to spiritual struggles in the life of the previous pastor(s) and members of the congregation.

Assessing the spiritual health of a congregation is both a science and an art. As far as the science aspect of this exercise goes, surveys can be very helpful. The use of surveys like *Natural Church Development* by Christian Schwartz and *Transformational Discipleship* from Lifeway ([tda.lifeway.com](http://tda.lifeway.com)) are helpful in evaluating a congregation on several differing points related to maturity, evangelism and serving.

This step is important and necessary and here's why: many declining churches are not suffering from a *belief* deficit but a *doing* deficit. They may know their Bible intellectually, however, members of declining churches have often failed to adequately heed James' warning to be doers of the Word and not just hearers only (James 1:22).

### How do visitors see our church?

As part of the consultation process with our metro association, we offer "secret shoppers" to attend services of the church we are working with. These intentional guests have been trained to evaluate and record their experiences from the viewpoint of an un-churched or churched guest looking for a place of worship. Such a personal experience and report is often powerful when disclosed to the church. A congregation may view itself as friendly, as having a winsome corporate worship service (from the singing, to the praying and teaching), as having a building that is easy to navigate and as having clean and up-to-date children's areas. Yet most of the time they are severely mistaken, and it is only after seeing themselves through the eyes of a visitor—formally documented in an official report—that a struggling church finally learns how it comes across, and why guests may not be coming back a second time.

### What are the demographics?

Likely, at the founding of the church, its members and attendees looked like the residents in the immediate area. In many declining churches, those who attend on Sunday morning do not resemble those living nearby. Whether it is in age, race, socio-economic or personal profile, the congregants are often disconnected from the community in which it resides, and unless a church is reaching the people in the neighborhood it is on a course headed for closure.

If a congregation doesn't reflect the community, it's likely not going to reach the community in which it resides. This is not to say there is no value in a diverse congregation or that a group unlike another can have no gospel impact—in fact the "mystery of the gospel" *is* that groups who appear mutually exclusive can miraculously be bound together in love (Ephesians 2:11-22). However, mono-demographic congregation can unknowingly communicate an exclusiveness that the gospel is expressly intended to eradicate simply by failing to reflect its community accurately.

Several demographic assessments are available commercially and can be accessed for free through local associations or state conventions. Focus the survey in one to two mile concentric circles, with the church as the center. Depending upon your context, you may need to limit the area of study to five miles if in an urban area, or widen it greatly if you are in a rural context where it is common to drive more than five miles to attend a church.

Compiling this data and comparing it to the composition of the congregation, paints a powerful picture of the church's ability—and track record—to meaningfully connect with the community. A good survey will include psychographics, which will explain core values, traits and outlooks of the residents within the community.

## Discern the church's reputation

A declining church may have a bad reputation in the community, and it could have such a reputation for any number of reasons. Some churches suffer from no reputation at all—meaning people just don't know they are there, and if they are aware of the church, they may know very little about it.

Discerning a church's reputation takes some legwork and networking. You can find ways to get this data but you'll have to be creative. Interviews with people on the street, conversations in restaurants and contacting city and government officials or nearby schools can provide you with helpful narratives. Approaching people with this kind of sterile, research-driven approach can be helpfully disarming. You'd be surprised how honest people will be if you tell them you're trying to get a random sampling around the area for community exegesis.

Here are a few questions we find helpful to ask:

When you hear (Church Name) what comes to mind?

- ☐ Have you ever heard of the church?

With an affirmative answer to the questions above, we continue the survey and ask these questions:

- ☐ What is the church known for in the community?
- ☐ How does the church contribute to the good of the community?
- ☐ Do you know anyone who worships at the church?
- ☐ If you had needs or spiritual questions would you consider attending \_\_\_\_\_ church?
- ☐ If \_\_\_\_\_ church closed its doors, would anyone notice?
- ☐ If \_\_\_\_\_ church were to cease to exist, what impact would it have on the community?

**Tip:** When those interviewed are church attendees, responses are often misleadingly favorable. To find the real reputation of the church among the unreached of the community, you'll need to specifically obtain responses from non-church attendees.

## Condition of the facilities

Physical environments communicate powerful messages to outsiders and newcomers. Unfortunately, most churches in decline have grown accustomed to their facilities and are often "blind" to the messages they unwittingly communicate.

While the church is much more than a building, the condition of the facilities in which the church gathers matters a great deal. We've found it helpful to document this area with pictures for use during the presentation to the leaders and congregation. Aside from general cleanliness, the following need to be assessed:

**Exterior appearance:** paint, landscaping, signage, parking lot, playground equipment, etc.

**Interior decor:** color scheme, age and condition of flooring, wall finishes and decorations, signage, furniture, condition and color of paint in traffic ways, etc.

**Children's areas:** age of toys and furnishings, condition of carpet, lighting and proximity to worship areas, security and check-in and pick-up procedures.

**Restrooms:** condition of fixtures and partitions, type of soap/towel dispensers, cleanliness and lighting.

**Mechanical:** HVAC and other systems should be assessed for condition and age, roof and drainage systems, note any deferred maintenance of existing facilities. Often overlooked are lighting fixtures, which may produce noise and inferior light quality as many churches have fluorescent tube or ballast applications. We also include the baptistery in this section. In some cases it has not been used frequently and will require reconditioning.

**Accessibility:** Are all areas accessible to those with disabilities? Where are the ramps, lifts, elevators and parking spots for those who require them?

**Audio visual:** sound systems and visual technology in the sanctuary, fellowship hall and classrooms.

**Information systems:** computer systems in office, online database systems, Wi-Fi access, copiers, phones, etc.

In assessing the facilities, we are looking specifically at condition, age and functionality. In other words, we are simply looking for minimum standards that one would expect to find in a local office building or coffee shop, where people in the community spend time convening for meetings and everyday interactions. We ask questions like, "Would newcomers and outsiders feel comfortable spending time here?" "Do our facilities represent a contemporary, comfortable environment, or are they dated?" "Do our facilities match the appearance and feel of the local "watering holes" in our community?"

In some assessments, we included conservative cost estimates of required/preferred upgrades to bring the facilities up-to-date and make them functional. Included in our resources is a sample site visit report.

### Should you evaluate the church governance?

Increasingly, we're finding that those interested in replanting and revitalizing churches are concerned about the way a church makes decisions. Many who are considering accepting a call to a church in decline or crisis are hesitant, in some cases rightly so, due to the reality that some church constitutions and bylaws give safe harbor to dissenters, bullies and other groups who are entrenched and resistant to making the changes necessary to move the struggling church forward.

In working with struggling churches, it is important that we determine early on if the day-to-day decision-making processes are so heavily weighted that every step forward will require congregational approval. In cases such as these, we recommend the congregation suspend the bylaws and appoint a board of decision makers that includes some from outside the church and some from within. At most, two to three from the existing congregation joined by two to three from outside is a good mixture. These could be denominational leaders, area replanters and existing pastors who exhibit a good track record of leadership and growth in their own contexts. In our plan, the local church retains voting power on the following:

- Call of the senior pastor
- Annual budget

- Changes to the bylaws and constitution
- Acquisition or disposition of property or debt.
- Church membership and matters of church discipline

**Questions that assist in the evaluation of church governance:**

- How often does the church gather for business meetings?
- Is there adequate representation from the overall body or do those who make decisions for the entire church represent a smaller subset?
- Are the meetings mission focused or administrative focused?
- Are committees free to make decisions within the scope of their responsibilities and budget lines? Do they feel they have to have congregational approval before acting on matters within these parameters?
- How many in the congregation are serving on multiple committees?
- Have there been contentious votes in recent history? Over what decisions?
- Are these meetings scheduled at times that allow for maximum participation? Are these meetings restricted by time and date requirements specified in the bylaws?

We have found in our work with declining and nearly dead churches that the current bylaws are often structured for churches well beyond the size of the current church's membership and attendance. When we have suggested suspending the bylaws, and have provided a plan for decision-making that honors both leaders and congregants working together, the stage has been set for forward progress. We suggest making this move prior to the arrival of a new pastor, so that upon his arrival, focus can turn from *theoretical administration of ministry* to *practical application of ministry*.

In making changes and recommendations in this area, we encourage you to consult with local legal and denominational officials to ensure that the church is functioning in ways that are compliant with local ordinances and regulations.



## Recommendation: Options for the struggling church

There is no one “size fits all” approach to revitalizing and replanting churches. Let that sink in for a moment. This means the work is often messy and there are no “road maps” or “recipes” that allow you to follow a step-by-step process that will necessarily lead to success.

Granted, there are approaches that are easier than others. There are approaches that are more successful. There are approaches that take a great deal of time and effort and involve greater risk. But the reality is, no two churches are identical, and therefore, no two revitalizations or replants will be identical.

It’s tempting for us as we work with churches to recommend the easy and sure over the difficult and uncertain. We may find ourselves justifying choosing the former over the latter because we are busy, we are leveraged, we are dealing with fickle people and valuable properties which means we are dealing with a lot of “what if’s,” a great number of “variables,” and the real prospect of seeing hours of work and millions of dollars lost if a church chooses to say no, or chooses a path that is high risk. But in spite of all of this, opting out for the easy route simply because it’s easier isn’t an option, our duty is to labor to discover the *faithful* route, and recommend that one.

God doesn’t call us to easy, He calls us to walk by faith. He receives more glory when we exercise great faith, which leads to greater praise for Him as He shows Himself faithful.

Having completed the exploration and evaluation phases, you now find yourself at the point of asking, “What is God’s best for this church?” This is the recommendation stage. Much like a physician, you’ve conducted tests, concluded your examination, and having now determined that the church you’re working with cannot continue as it has, your task is to recommend a course of action.

In our work with churches, we focus on five primary recommendations. Each has with it inherent risks, benefits and success rates. Some are more difficult to accept, others are easier to implement. Each one is valid, and is an option for the church to prayerfully consider. The leaders of the church you are working with need to understand each option and they need to hear which one or two you recommend they prayerfully consider.

Typically, we offer no more than one or two recommendations. We explain our reasons in a written one to two-page document, which is given to the leaders during the presentation. You’ll find an example in the resources we have included in this book.

### Options for churches in decline or near death

#### Church Revitalization

**Revitalization = existing church + existing leaders + existing structure + history + renewed/new effort**

Revitalization is the deliberate, dedicated and protracted effort to reverse the decline or death of an existing church.

Kenneth Priest, President of the SBTC offers this helpful definition:

**Revitalization:** The supernatural work of God that restores health and vitality in a plateaued or declining church, evidenced by submission to God’s Word, right relationships among members and a renewed commitment to Great Commission ministry.

## Characteristics

- The least invasive approach
- Utilizes existing structures, leadership and congregants
- Requires less change up front
- Less likely to experience conflict overall
- May be led by an existing or new pastor. (It is less likely to occur successfully with a long tenured existing pastor; more likely, a new pastor will be the best way to move forward).
- Requires a great deal of time—the pace of change is slow
- High risk as the church may reject the efforts of the pastor and leaders and ask them to leave or remove them through elevated conflict or forced termination
- Is less likely to lead to lasting change and more likely to be a continuation of the same
- Is the least effective approach for churches facing imminent closure

### May recommend this option when:

- The church is not ready/resistant for drastic change
- The church is unwilling to partner or give up control to a Supporting or Sending Church
- The church has adequate funds (5-10 years) to continue doing ministry
- The congregation is motivated and unified
- The congregation is contextually congruent with the surrounding community
- The majority of the congregants live in the community. General rule: The farther away congregants live away from the church (true of urban and suburban areas) the less likely that group is going to be able to revitalize the church.
- They are willing to follow a new leader

## Replant

**Replant = new leader + new people + new structures/approaches + history**

A decision to close an existing church and re-launch as a new church, with new leadership (pastor), new name, new identity, new governance, new ministry approach and overall new philosophy of ministry. In some cases, it is not necessary to adopt a new name but simply adjust it. In some instances where a denominational label is a hindrance to reaching the community or where the name is unnecessarily long or confusing, a name change may be appropriate.

Replanting: The process in which members of a church facing imminent closure discern God's leadership to dissolve their current ministry and work with other churches or denominational bodies to begin a new church for a new season of ministry in their community.

## Characteristics

- Builds on the history/legacy of the previous church
- Requires new leadership (assessed and approved replant pastor)
- New decision-making structure and new decision makers who handle the daily decisions (replant leadership team, transition team)
- Offers a break with the past (end date) and a fresh start for the future (launch date)
- Historical factors may linger among those who were part of the previous church
- Resource hungry: salary for replanter, money for redecorating, facility upgrades, re-branding, need for new congregants, volunteers and staff.
- New identity can create momentum and enthusiasm and interest in the community
- This is the most drastic approach and is often rejected or not entertained by existing churches
- May be eligible to apply for funding as a new church plant (according to State Convention Process)
- High risk and high reward
- Often takes 5-7 years for the replant to become established culturally
- May not grow to be self-sustaining

## May recommend when:

- There is a high receptivity and readiness to embrace change
- The existing community and facility are in a highly unreached and underserved by a gospel-proclaiming church.
- The existing church facilities are in adequate shape and the community context is growing and or stable.
- The congregation is aged and disconnected with the surrounding community
- The church will not survive financially in the next three years and an end date is imminent and may be hastened by departures of members, church splits, deaths of long time congregants.
- There are existing people groups who are not being reached with the gospel
- When the church is “all in” and ready to do whatever it takes to reach others
- A potential replanter has been identified and the church is willing to call them as pastor

## Marriage Merger

**Merger/Marriage = one struggling church + a strong church or church plant = combined history and combined church. The strong church takes the lead.**

The joining together of an existing unhealthy or declining church and a healthy existing church or church plant.

## Characteristics

- Two churches coming together to form one new church
- There is a healthy church plant in the area that is looking to launch.

- The healthy church takes the lead position
- The unhealthy church gives up assets, control and decision making
- Requires lengthy process meetings and clear communication as the specifics of the merger are developed, and addressed, and agreed upon
- Legal consultation is required as one church closes and ceases to exist and assets are transferred to the other church
- Can be a blessing to both churches with increased members and a greater number of volunteers
- Requires caution as some may develop an “us” and “them” posture toward one another
- Often requires the assistance of an outside third party to facilitate discussion and decision making between the two congregations

**May recommend when:**

- There is a strong effective gospel proclaiming church in the immediate community
- The church is open to forming a partnership with another congregation
- The struggling church is willing to follow the leadership and adopt the ministry style of the other congregation.
- The legacy/established church is “open handed with their facilities”
- There is a high receptivity and readiness to embrace change and new leadership
- There is a short window of opportunity in which to act for the future of the church.

## Campus/Adoption

**Campus/Adoption = (strong church and its resources, leadership and brand) + struggling church**

The adoption or absorption of an existing church in decline or near death by a larger healthy church.

**Characteristics**

- The adopted church gives up all control and assets to the adopting church
- New leadership replaces existing leadership
- Results in immediate growth numerically
- Typically yields abundant resources for facilities and ministry
- Most often results in a loss of historical identity and legacy
- Strength of recognized “brand” in community
- Much lower risk than revitalization, replanting and merger
- Existing church members have option of becoming members of the adopting church

**May recommend when:**

- A nearby healthy partnering church-has a sizeable group of people attending worship gatherings at their location-who are driving from your church’s neighborhood.
- The existing church is not able to or willing to take radical actions to address its true condition.

- There is a good match between ministry philosophies and a commitment to the greater work of the kingdom.
- When a church is resource deprived, and in great need financially and strategically
- The existing or established church is humble and receptive to outside leaders and families.

## Closure of Church/Disposition of Property

**Closure = depleted resources, tired congregation, no ability/desire to continue + willingness to let go for the sake of the kingdom.**

The existing church closes, and deeds assets and property are transferred to a denomination or church.

### Characteristics

- Least desirable, since this option fails to build upon the history and legacy of pre-existing church
- Easiest approach
- Administratively burdensome on the entity receiving the assets and property
- Allows for the potential creation of a ministry center which could house multiple congregations

### May recommend when:

- The people are done and there's no desire/ability to keep going
- The majority of the congregation is highly unrepresentative of the surrounding community.
- When the church may have declined because the community has around them has transition to a non-neighborhood.
- The church facility is in great disrepair
- Large established or healthy church plants are in the immediate area and serving the neighborhood in which the church meets.
- Financial resources are completely exhausted

## Presentation: Communicating with the congregation

Having done your due diligence in assessing the condition of the church, it is time to communicate your findings to them in a helpful way. Because you are working with a church long in decline—and perhaps in eminent crisis—this will be an important meeting, which will require prayer, preparation and pastoral care. It's likely that the news will be difficult both to deliver and to receive.

Presenting material of this kind and scope will require, at minimum, two hours. We've learned from experience that scheduling this meeting as a stand-alone gathering, rather than following worship service or business meeting, is a best practice. Moving forward in this way sets the stage for the meeting to be taken seriously; the attendees will see that it is important and critical enough to take place on its own rather than an add-on gathering.

Here are a few things you will have to establish during this meeting:

### **Remind them why you are there**

Referring back to the invitation or request you received to get involved in order to help the church lets them re-center their focus, and it reminds them that you are for them and with them. Recall together the chain of events that led up to this point and then define for them the stage you are in and what the focus of this gathering will be. Remind them that you are relaying the information *they* gave you, and you are there to help them consider the future God has for them. Don't underestimate the value of reminding them that you are on their side, and that you have their best intentions in mind.

### **Begin with the leaders**

Every congregation places a level of trust or delegated authority in their leaders. Meeting with the key influencers as you unpack your findings will help you gauge the overall readiness for change that could possibly take place in the church. It's important to present the findings with leaders and then to the expanding circles of stakeholders or key influencers. We do not recommend presenting the findings to the entire congregation first.

### **Present the findings**

In sharing the findings of the evaluation, we have found it helpful to use a combination of printed information, in the form of handouts, and visual information, in PowerPoint or other similar applications. Rather than handing out all documents at once, we have learned that staging them one at a time keeps the team on the same page and helps to strategically build toward the recommendations for the church. It is also important to pause and have discussion around each section you present, asking for questions and giving clarifications allowing time for discussion and response.

It's not uncommon for nonverbal reactions range from tears, to affirmative nodding, to frustration or acceptance. A wide response range is actually helpful as it often best represents what you will encounter in the congregation.

As you complete the presentation, ask for feedback with the following questions:

1. What in the presentation did not surprise you?
2. What in the presentation did you find surprising?
3. What in the presentation was difficult for you to learn? Why?
4. Which parts of the presentation cause you to have questions?



5. How do you anticipate others in the congregation will respond to this information?
6. Which key leaders need to hear this presentation next?

### **Widening the circle**

As a next step in communicating with the congregation, it is important to include key stakeholders from various leadership positions within the church. We also recommend equipping leaders from this initial group to assist in communicating the findings to their fellow church members. This is especially important when communicating with the entire congregation. When the congregation's own leaders communicate to their own people it gives a level of authority and importance to the information and increases the likelihood of acceptance of the findings, since it is relayed by those whom the people see as their own leaders; members of the church.

### **A proposed communication and decision-making schedule**

- Presentation of evaluation findings to the leadership team (week one)
  - » Leaders debrief and prayer (week two)
- Presentation to key stakeholders and other church leaders (week three)
  - » Extended leaders debrief and prayer
- Leaders decide which recommendation to take to the larger church body (week four)
- Presentation to the church body (week five)
  - » Townhall Q&A 1 (week six)
  - » Townhall Q&A 2 (week seven)
  - » Church prayer gathering (week eight)
- Church body convenes to decide on recommendations (week nine)

During the congregational communication phase, it is important to produce a brief one to two page summary of the findings and the recommendations. Often it is helpful to have members of the association or revitalization team present to assist in answering questions or providing feedback.

We have learned from experience that congregations need adequate time to process the recommendations, and as such, we do not recommend a time frame of less than two to three weeks. Initial reactions to recommendations are often strong, but they also soften over time as the truth sinks in and the weight of the realities regarding the congregation have time to settle into the hearts and minds of the church members.

We also realize that this is a spiritual journey and process. Allowing time for prayer and discussion is vitally important as a congregation discerns God's will together for the future of their church.

We do not recommend holding an open discussion the day of the scheduled vote on the recommendations. In some cases where this has taken place, high emotions and last minute efforts to add to or remove recommendations arise explosively, causing both confusion and division. In some cases, we have seen individuals and groups derail the meeting and the vote on the recommendations.

Congregants who are active members in good standing should be allowed to vote by signed written ballot. Those who are voting should have their membership verified via the church membership roll. In most cases, this is done informally due to the size of the church body. Local church leaders often need encouragement and guidance on how to handle questions related to voting and handling conflict.

Since each church is unique, this process will need to follow the unique bylaws and must be within the guidelines specified for voting.

### **In cases of extreme conflict or dissension**

You may have heard stories about churches that see a sudden influx of members who have been long absent or thought to have joined other churches showing up for a key vote regarding the future of a church. Unfortunately, such instances are based in reality. Churches, particularly ones who have experienced long decline, often fail to uphold commitments to faithful membership. We have rarely seen actions like this come as a surprise to the leaders of the church; they are aware of this possibility well ahead of time.

Many times leaders feel trapped between following the bylaws and being nice, even in the face of blatant un-Christ-like behavior.

Such conflict must be addressed biblically and firmly with grace and truth. As one who may be facilitating or walking a church through this process you will likely need to coach and encourage the leaders you are working with to be faithful rather than fearful, and to be biblical in their approach to dealing with sin and division.

Bill Easum has written a very helpful article entitled, [On not being nice for the sake of the gospel](#), on the importance of dealing with difficult people in the church, which is included in the resource section of this book.

## Affirmation: The church chooses an option

As a final step in the recommendation process, the leadership team of the church now asks the congregation to come together to vote on—or affirm—the recommendations brought as a result of the exploration and evaluation process.

When the leaders have led the congregation well through a process, which includes time for questions and answers (i.e., through town hall meetings with the members), we have found that people are typically ready to vote and move forward. In other words, they will be ready to take action steps only once they've been given the opportunity to fully grasp the propositions and be heard.

We have recommended the following schedule and structure as the church comes together for this important decision.

### Schedule and structure

This meeting ought to occur after the morning worship gathering, immediately after the service. Since the time of discussion will have taken place officially in previous meetings, no discussion ought to be held regarding the matter up for vote.

The question should be read again to the congregation with instructions for voting.

Paper ballots ought to be passed out to the members who are gathered, which list one or two options per the decision being recommended. These ballots should include places for the members who are voting to print and sign their name, which will be checked against the current membership roll of the church.

Designated members from the leadership team will then receive the votes and tally them.

The announcement of the result of the vote can then be made by phone calls from the leaders of the church or revealed at a midweek gathering or simply announced via email. (It should be noted that it is often best to announce the results in person when the church is gathered again, but if that is not feasible, the other means listed above are acceptable).

### Recording the results

It is important to have the church clerk, moderator, or designated leader draft a letter with the results of the vote, which will be delivered to the congregation via mail or in person at a church gathering.

This letter should state specifically the terms of the decision, the resultant actions that will be taken, and it should be entered into the business meeting notes for official documentation. This form of documentation is crucial, as referring back to this letter and church decision can be helpful if questions arise from members as to the details of the church's vote.

All bases, in other words, should be covered in an effort to wipe out any trace of ambiguity or vagueness; clarity is the name of the game. You will find a sample letter included with the resources of this book.

# Implementation: Taking next steps

## **Moving forward**

Upon receiving the affirmation from the church, the work toward implementing the approved course of action can now take place. This is a critical point in the life of the existing leaders. Some, relieved the decision has been made, will likely feel they can now transition out of their roles. For some this is appropriate but key leaders will need to stay in place as the church works toward the implementation of the plan as it has been approved.

## **Focus the congregation spiritually**

Replanting and revitalizing a church is first and foremost a work of the Holy Spirit. The best strategies and plans cannot and will not equate to a vibrant, alive and fully functioning church. Changing the name, the decor and the ministries of the church may all be necessary steps but the first and most important work in implementing a replant is the work of God in the lives of those who are part of the church. Prayer campaigns, house meetings, strategic sermon series, retreats and fellowship gatherings all play an important role in shaping the life of the church under the authority of God's word and the power of the Holy Spirit. Details and logistics cannot supersede the work of focusing the congregation spiritually.

## **Designate the transitional leaders**

Outside leadership is often required to facilitate the process of moving forward. A denominational leader or pastor serving on the transitional leadership team can fill this position. Working closely with a key leader or leaders from the congregation is important during this initial season of transition. In the case of a replant or merger, a team is typically designated to formulate steps toward change and make the decisions on behalf of the congregation. In our experience establishing a team of leaders comprised of some from inside the congregation and some from outside is necessary to lead the church forward. See our resource *Developing a Replant Team* for more information.

## **Care for and celebrate the congregation**

As the church moves forward, it will be important to provide pastoral care for those who remain, in the case of a replant, merger/marriage or adoption. Many times there is a good deal of uncertainty as the transition progresses. An appropriate continuation of basic church gatherings and meetings, provide the stability necessary to keep people connected to one another and moving in the right direction. Those needing to be changed should be given an end date and celebrated as they cease.

## **Communicate clearly and frequently**

In most cases the decision-making responsibilities have shifted from the entire to church to a smaller group of leaders. An advantage is the speed with which decisions can now be made— the correlating disadvantage is that fewer people are “in the know” about what is taking place. A communication strategy that includes written and in-person updates helps to keep people on the same page and prepares the congregation for upcoming changes.

## **Develop a Plan**

After the congregation has voted to be Replanted a draft plan will need to be developed. We recommend that this be done by a new Replant Pastor along with the new leadership team. Sample plans are included in the resource section.

## **Determine a transition schedule**

Some changes can begin immediately and should, others will follow depending upon logistic and legal considerations. Programmatic changes can be delayed for a while or staged over

time, which will allow people to step toward their future in a measured way. If the church has determined to close, it will be important to set a schedule that allows for celebration and recognition of ministry and history. A timeline for transfer of assets and legal designations will need to be carefully considered as you continue this transition. We recommend consulting with a lawyer who specializes in church law.

### **Legal considerations**

Each state and local municipality has regulations regarding the cessation of organizations, transfer of property and assets and merging of two separate organizations. It is incumbent upon the transition team to designate a member or members to discover and discern the legalities in the implementation of the approved plan.

In some replants we have found that it is helpful to retain the original church as the legally recognized organization or entity and let the newly replanted church function as the public face of the legacy church via a D.B.A (Doing Business As) designation from the Secretary of State. This often enables the church to move forward without incurring costly facility upgrades.

We strongly recommend consulting with those who are experienced in property and church law. Organizations like the Church Law Group ([churchlawgroup.com](http://churchlawgroup.com)) have experience and can offer solid counsel.

### **Celebrate**

Replanting and revitalizing is difficult work. It is hard for those who remain at the church to have the growing sense that the church they loved and knew is no longer the church they attend. Some in our replanters have described it this way: “It’s looks like our church but it doesn’t feel like our church anymore.” Those who may join in the effort and be new to the congregation may grow restless and impatient wondering when the church is going to finally be the church they came to be part of developing. Celebrating people and historic ministries as well as new advances, helps the congregation move forward together.

### **Address conflict**

The goal in replanting is to redeem a once dead and dying church for the glory of God, the good of the community and the mission of the gospel. With that work conflict is bound to emerge. Our enemy, Satan, has held the church in his grip and he likely won’t let go easily. His greatest attack will be in the form of congregational conflict. Conflict can emerge from anyone, anywhere, anytime. As a leader and with your leaders, you must lovingly address conflict when and where it appears. In reality, not everyone who has been part of the church or has come to be a part of the replant will stay with you. This is why we view replanting and revitalization as long term projects. The average time in which one can expect the church to turn around is at or after the five year mark. Addressing conflict will enable the church to continue moving forward.

### **Evaluate and redirect**

Plans on paper are just that. New opportunities and obstacles will present themselves regularly which means your team will need to consistently evaluate and potentially change course. Often, God ordained delays serve to build prayerful patience in the lives of the leaders and congregation. Adopt the mentality of a distance runner rather than a sprinter.

## Multiplication: Replanting again

The crisis is serious and the need drastic. Churches are dying at a rate of nearly 900 per year. Over the past five years we have seen that rate slow by God's grace, and eventually we are confident—and prayerfully hopeful—that we will see it reverse. But that will require more than an effort from a few on the denominational level. Desperation to see God glorified in resurrecting dying churches to vibrant bastions of truth and godliness is what we want to see as an obvious characteristic of Christians in general, and church leaders (including *future* church leaders) in particular.

### **A replanted church must replant**

Likely, it's very difficult for a church that is near death, or in significant decline, to ever imagine themselves as a reproducing church. However, that's *precisely* what they ought to be imagining, and not just in some vague, future hypothetical sense either. They shouldn't be thinking, "Wouldn't it be nice if we could do that *eventually*?" but rather, "How can we take concrete steps toward such an end?" After all, who better to coach, support, encourage and resource another church facing death, than one who was very recently in their same situation, and for whom God intervened and brought back to life?

It may seem counterintuitive, but one of the most beneficial things a struggling church can do in order to become healthier is to look outside of itself to other churches that need help. In God's economy, we are filled as we empty ourselves for others—this is true of individual Christians, and corporate bodies of Christians. So it is incredibly important to inject the multiplication impulse into the DNA of a replant in its infancy.

How can a church with little resources and few people contribute to the work of replanting and revitalizing other churches? You might be surprised to discover that opportunities abound. Here are a few examples:

### **Tell the story**

Word travels fast, especially among churches. When God moves and restores a church, it is an opportunity for that church to glorify God by sharing the story of what God has done to bring back life and vitality. Key leaders and congregants from the church can visit with leaders from churches who are in decline or near death. Their story and testimony give evidence that God can move and work, despite the apparent bleakness of any given situation. This brings hope and the potential for renewal. Additionally, it may give struggling churches the convicting dose of realism they require. When they hear about the sacrifice, hard work and flexibility that goes into seeing a dying church (much like their own) become healthy again, they will often be convicted and challenged to step out in faith in the same way.

### **Send people**

It's counterintuitive to think that a church who has worked so hard to grow and retain people should entertain the idea of sending people to replant another church. One of the primary needs of a church in the early days of replanting is people, especially those who understand and are experienced with the work and all it involves. However, when churches get the vision to send and give away people, we've seen God do incredible things. This axiom has been proven true time and time again: the church that gives is the church that receives.

### **Share your wisdom**

A benefit and blessing provided for us within the body of Christ is that we are given *one another*. We are privileged to learn from one another's experiences. God often speaks *to* His people, *through* His people. The work of replanting is often uncertain and unsure, and those



who have survived the valleys and have come out on the other side can offer counsel on every aspect of a church's life. This counsel is valuable in that it directs, reassures and reminds a church in the process of replanting that God is with them and will see them through.

### **Support and pray**

One of the *benefits* of replanting and revitalizing a church is that the church usually has a building and property. And, as strange as it may seem, one of the *difficulties* is that the church has a building and property. Facility issues often must be addressed. Where possible, other churches can come in and assist with building modifications, cleaning, painting, grounds keeping and the like. This is where the replanted church comes in. Physical and material support serves as an accelerant to a replanting and revitalizing church as well as providing much needed encouragement.

## Things we've learned along the way

I'm not an expert in replanting or revitalizing churches, but I have experienced many things as a replanting pastor and in working with churches who seek to do the same. I pass these along as one who hopes your experience may vary or be even better than mine, or some of those with whom I've worked.

Years ago when I was going through a church planting assessment, the facilitator shared his own story and used a phrase that has stayed with me—one that has guided my own experience. He said, "God always works to redeem your pain, and He most often does that when you share what you have learned with others."

Here are a few things I have learned. I pray that it may be helpful to you and your team as you replant and revitalize for God's glory.

- The longer the term of decline, and the greater the average tenure of existing members, the greater the time is required for renewal.
- The more acute the crisis, the more vigorous the action steps are required to address and arrest the declining condition of the church.
- Outside leadership, resources, new members and attenders are required and necessary to truly create new culture and positive change.
- When long time members say they want change, they probably mean they want more people doing the things the church has historically done.
- Dead and declining churches have lots of clutter and things that need to be thrown away—proceed carefully and wisely.
- The Bylaws can wait—most churches aren't functioning by them anyway. Lead the church to function according to the biblical commands for churches.
- You will be blindsided by conflict—be prepared but don't be fearful. Conflict often comes from people and places you don't expect, so be faithful and be biblical, and God will see you through.
- The cost is great—replanting and revitalizing will cost you time, comfort and friendships.
- Your confidence will likely take a hit or two as well. Keep going, Christ is sufficient.
- You can't and won't keep everyone because people like the church the way it was; they've been hanging around to see what it would become. When change happens there will be something that will be an "ender" for them—a straw to break the camel's back—and they will have had enough and will leave. Bless them and thank them publically and privately for their support.
- Church finances will decline and you will lose givers. When changes begin occurring, people withhold their money. This is the first sign of progress and a sign of where the conflict in the body may be occurring. Someone on your team needs to watch for this and respond appropriately.
- Guests may not return and perhaps I should say they won't return, at least some of them. This can be discouraging and devastating. You're trying to grow and keep people, but you're not quite big enough yet to offer anonymity to guests who want to check out your church. Persevere. Be who you are. Don't apologize for the size of the crowd and practice good follow-up. God will grow His church at the rate and to the degree He sees fit.

- Focus on change in terms of five years. Turning a church around takes time, on average, five years. Give yourself grace, work hard and labor faithfully.
- Encourage and bless. Replanting is difficult, there may not be a lot to celebrate, so find something you can celebrate and praise it; bless your people. Publicly thank those who have stayed and those who are sacrificing for the work of God.
- Faithfulness is success. Few churches explode numerically. If your church doesn't, understand that is not an indication of failure. Failure is not being faithful to God's call to be a under-shepherd of Jesus and care for the congregation.
- You will want to quit. It probably won't be over some major crisis, but rather a multitude of small ones. Persevere, watch your health (spiritually and physically) and take time off to refresh.
- You'll uncover sin. Be like Jesus, who in the book of Revelation acknowledged the strengths of the seven churches of Laodicea, but who also addressed their sin and rebuked them accordingly. Churches that are in decline or near death are likely there due to sin. Pray that God reveals such sin—be it historic or current—address it and move on in God's grace.
- God is faithful. God always provides what you need, typically not before you need it, but when you need it. This increases our dependence upon Him, and that is a good thing.

# On Not Being Nice, “For the Sake of the Gospel”

By Bill Easum

Throughout all of my consulting ministry, I have seen a disturbing pattern ... most established churches are held hostage by one or two bullies. Some individual or small group of individuals are usually extremely opposed to the church making any radical change, even if it means the change would give the church a chance to thrive once again. I keep hearing pastors say, “If I tried that, I’d lose my job!”

Courageous pastors often ask, “What do I do when one person intimidates the church so much that it is not willing to try something new?” My response is always, “Either convert them, neutralize them, kick them out, or kill them. The Body can not live with cancer.” To which someone usually cries, “That’s not very Christian!”

My response describes much of the wisdom of both the Old Testament and Jesus. Maturing Christians love so deeply that they will do anything, even not being nice, “for the sake of the Gospel. Jesus was so compassionate toward others that he could not remain quiet when he saw people holding other people in bondage.

The Old Testament story of the wilderness wanderings contains a remarkable account of how Moses responded to a group of people who insisted on keeping the Hebrews bondage to the past.<sup>1</sup> A group of people led by Korah came to Moses asking him to relinquish leadership because they wanted to take the Hebrews back to Egypt. Moses responded by falling on his face prostrate before them in prayer. Then he got up and slew all of them. Not very nice, but necessary if they were going to get to Canaan. Moses knew that freedom with God was better than slavery with Pharaoh. The same is true today... freedom to grow in grace is always better than enslavement to the status quo.

Almost every struggling church has at least one dysfunctional bully who goes out of the way to be a big fish in a small pond. Often, that is the primary reason the church is struggling. This person gets his/her sense of self-worth by keeping the church so intimidated, either by their actions or their money, that very little can happen without that person’s approval. The sad thing is most of the leaders know that this person is a stumbling block to the church’s future and they will not do anything about it. The church leaders ignore the bully thinking that is the Christian thing to do, and in so doing, assist in the stunted growth or death of the congregation.

For example, I was working with a staff in a large church. The first day I met with the staff the tension was so high I could cut the air with a knife. The staff hardly said a word to one another. The next day when we met the staff laughed and cut up together as if they were one big happy family. As I looked around the table, the only apparent difference was that one staff person was not present. I asked the staff if they sensed the difference I was feeling. They knew exactly what I meant. Finally one of them blurted out, “Jim is not here today. Staff meetings are always better when he’s not here.” It turned out that Jim was a dysfunctional bully who ran to the personnel committee every time he didn’t get his way. Because of him several competent staff members had been fired. To make matters worse, the staff knew that Jim seldom contributed anything to the health and vitality of the church.

I asked the staff if they had confronted Jim with how they felt. Their response was typical for church folks. “That would not be the Christian thing to do. It would hurt him deeply. After all, the church is all he has.” Sure, it’s all that he has; no one else would put up with him. Who is the most dysfunctional, Jim or the staff?

A church not far from me told its Bishop that it wanted a young pastor. It wasn't long before they got one. One of the first things the young pastor did was ask the Board to change the appearance of the church newspaper. The Board unanimously voted to do so. Four months later, I noticed the newspaper was switched back to its old form. I called the pastor to ask why. His response is a classic. "Most of the Board were present the night we voted. However, one man was out of the country. When he returned to find that a decision had been made in his absence, he demanded that the chairperson immediately call another meeting. At the second meeting, the Board voted unanimously to rescind their previous decision about the newspaper." When I asked why, he replied: "This man always pays off any deficit at the end of year and he wanted the vote changed. The Board was afraid to buck him." The future of that church was held hostage to a bully.

I'm convinced that one of the main sins of the established church is that we have taught ourselves to be nice instead of being Christian. In spite of aspiring to be a disciple of Jesus, we teach that the essence of Christianity is to be nice. Where do we get such a notion? Certainly not from the actions of Jesus.

One of the hallmarks of Jesus's ministry was his constant attack on the status quo. He challenged it every time he could. He even went out of his way to upset the religious bullies of his time. He called them "white sepulchers" and by doing so attacked the very heart of their priesthood based on purity.<sup>2</sup> Jesus loved church leaders too much to allow them remain such small persons. When Peter showed his displeasure over the impending death of his Lord, Jesus said to him "Get behind me Satan."<sup>3</sup> Jesus loved his disciples too much to let them miss one of the more important lessons of servanthood. Jesus, the man who said, "be compassionate as God is compassionate,"<sup>4</sup> had no desire to be nice because ...being nice has nothing to do with being Christian. Being nice is often nothing more than a lack of compassion for people. Let's explore what this means.

At one point, in a holy rage, Jesus entered the Temple with a large, metal-tipped whip and drove out the money changers. As he did, he quipped, "It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but you have made it a den of thieves."<sup>5</sup> If we discover why Jesus responded to religious bullies this way, we will also discover why so many church leaders refuse to follow his example.

When Jesus cleansed the temple he was in the Court of the Gentiles. This was the only part of the temple where gentiles were allowed to worship. What ticked Jesus off was that the religious leaders were using the only place gentiles could worship God as the place to sell their wares. What was to be a place of spiritual discovery and worship for the gentiles, was turned into an economic opportunity for the religious leaders. (Sound familiar?) The focus of the religious leaders was on themselves, not the spiritual vitality of the gentiles. So he drove them out.

Therefore, thieves are those who do religious things for their own purpose. So when we are doing things that only benefit those within the church, we become a den of thieves. When we say that we want it this way because it has always been this way, we are a den of thieves. We when focus on only the needs of our members, we are robbing the community of a chance to join us in our journey of faith. Such action is intolerable for people of compassion and love.

Church leaders are robbing people of their spiritual birthright when they allow dysfunctional people to sell their petty wares in the house of God rather than to proclaim release from bondage. We really need to get clear on this problem and do something about it. If we really love people, and if we really want them to experience the love of God, then we will

not ever allow the bully to rob others of their spiritual birthright. Anyone who knows how family systems work, knows that the worst thing one can do with dysfunctional people is to give them more attention by giving into their every whim. Instead, tough love has to be applied. The compassionate thing to do is to hold them accountable for their self-centered actions for in doing so they may begin the journey with God.

Jesus shows us what to do with people who do not want to grow spiritually. In training his disciples how to spread the word of God's love, he told the disciples to "shake off the dust of your feet" when they encountered people who did not receive them graciously.<sup>6</sup> Jesus loved people too much to let anything slow down the process of setting people free from their bondage whatever it is.

People who would rather be nice than Christian do not love enough. They do not have enough compassion. Instead, they are afraid of hurting someone or of being hurt. Remember, fear is the opposite of love. "Perfect love casts out all fear."<sup>7</sup>

If we really cared about people, we would not allow anyone to bully others into submission, instead we would want every person to feel free enough to express their hopes and dreams, to stretch their wings, and to reach their God-given potential. If we really loved people, we would not base our decisions on whether or not people would like us for those decisions. Being nice or being liked is never a goal for followers of Jesus.

### **What does being nice accomplish in the church?**

- more dysfunctional people
- fewer spiritual giants
- an intimidated congregation
- an inability to spread the Gospel
- little hope of renewal or growth
- discouraged church leaders.

Being nice is not what Jesus wants from any of us.

One of the basic lessons I'm learning as a consultant is that before renewal begins in a church or denomination, it is normal that someone has to leave or be denied. Almost every time a dying church attempts to thrive once again, someone tries to bully the leadership out of the attempt. And almost every time, if a turn around is to take place, such persons are lost along the way because they are no longer allowed to get their way. When they can't get their way, they leave. Not even Jesus got through the journey with all of their disciples. Why should we expect too?

This does not mean that we should set out to intimate the bully or to kick people out of the church. It does mean that we care enough about the future of our church not to allow anyone to stifle its ability to liberate people from bondage or victimization. It means that we care enough about the bully that we will not allow the bully to intimate the church because we know the spiritual vitality of both the bully and the church is at stake.

Matthew 18 gives us a formula for dealing with the dysfunctional bully. First, an individual privately confronts the person with what he/she is doing and asks the person to stop. If this doesn't achieve positive results, two or more people are to confront the person. If this does not resolve the matter, the person is to be brought before the entire church. Listen again to



the notso- nice words of Jesus. “And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.” In other words, withdraw from that person’s presence, or in our case remove that person from office! Never, ever, allow such a person to dictate the direction of the church.<sup>8</sup>

The next time someone in your church attempts to intimidate or bully the church out of taking a positive step forward, go to God in prayer, and then get out the metal-tipped whip and drive that person out of the church....of course in love.<sup>9</sup>

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1 Numbers 16

2 Matthew 23:27

3 Matthew 16:23

4 Luke 6:36

5 Matthew 21:13

6 Matthew 10:14

7 1 John 4:18

8 Matthew 18:17

9 For more on how to do this, see William M. Easum, *Sacred Cows Make Gourmet Burgers* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995.)

# Governance change proposal

**Background:** In previous years Sherwood has discussed and considered ways to more effectively organize and lead ministry for gospel advance and church growth. Under the previous pastor, a plan to empower a streamline committee to research and make recommendations was suggested. He later resigned and Sherwood entered a time of transition. During the interim leadership period, it was decided that this process should be placed on hold while our church awaited the arrival of a new pastor.

Since calling Bob Bickford as our Lead pastor, we have seen Sherwood move forward and has begun growing once again. Recently, we have much to celebrate:

- Growth in our average attendance of nearly 30 each weekend
- The addition of 15+ new members
- A steady stream of guests and visitors
- Celebration of two baptisms
- Refreshing and supplying our children's classrooms
- The opening of additional children's church classrooms
- An attendance of 20-25 in our children's church on a regular basis.
- A sense of excitement and enthusiasm within our congregation and the community.

As we look toward the future, we anticipate continued growth and impact. This being the case we believe as the pastor liaison team that it is time to address our governance structure and decision making processes here at Sherwood.

Our current governance model and present bylaws were typical of most Southern Baptist Churches constituted in the 1950's and 60's. Those structures worked well in a time where committee work was common and understood. They functioned well when a congregation had considerable size where individuals did not have to serve on multiple committees in order to carry out church business. These structures were adequate in making decisions in a culture where time constraints were not as immediate and an organizations decision-making process did not need to adapt and adjust quickly.

Our congregation at large has recognized that our present bylaws need to be changed as we have experienced pain points as a congregation in both leading Sherwood and in our decision-making process.

The following have been noted as a few of the examples pointing to a necessary change.

## Our Present Bylaws

- Create a focus on administration of ministry rather than participation in gospel ministry
- Because of present attendance members are required to serve in multiple roles
- Place a heavy time burden upon those that currently serve in multiple committee roles
- Limit larger congregational participation in directional decision making due to the mandated schedule of business meetings<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Article V Church Business Section I  
The Church shall hold a regular business meeting the second Wednesday of each month.

- Limit our ability to be responsive to congregational needs due to a cumbersome decision-making process
- Reinforce a climate of suspicion and lack of trust for leaders
- Allow loopholes for disconnected members and inactive leaders to unduly influence Church direction without actually demonstrating commitment to the overall body.
  - » Absent Members Guideline<sup>2</sup>
  - » Deacon Emeritus Rule<sup>3</sup>
- Create frustration for those serving on committees
  - » Everyone can say “no”, no one can say “yes”
  - » Grant responsibility and expect accountability without giving authority
- Reinforce division and create conflict within our body during the decision-making process <sup>4</sup>
- Revisions or changes to the bylaws are difficult and the process cumbersome.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Article II Discipline Section 1

Continued and unexplained absence from the meetings of the church shall be considered sufficient reason for examination as to the cause thereof, and, after two years of such absence, the Church may direct erasure of the name of such person from the roll.

<sup>3</sup> A Deacon Emeritus has the same authority as an Active Deacon and may attend and vote at all Deacon Committee meetings. b) A Deacon Emeritus is not assigned families for which he is responsible, nor is he a part of the normal rotation of Active Deacon Duties.

<sup>4</sup> Any Church member present at a business meeting may request that the vote on any item of business be taken by ballot, and the request shall not be denied.

<sup>5</sup> Article VII Amendments The bylaws may be amended at any regular monthly business meeting of the Church by an affirmative vote of two-thirds (2/3) of the members present, provided a quorum of 20% of resident Church membership exists, and provided the amendment shall have been offered in writing at a previous regular monthly business meeting, and provided announcement of the proposed change shall have been made from the pulpit at least 2 regular meetings of the Church prior to action on the proposed amendment.

**Recommendation:** Given the present reality, and need of our church to move forward in its process of revitalization, the following changes are recommended.

1. **Suspension of the existing bylaws for the period of one year while new bylaws are drafted.**
2. **Establishment of an interim governance structure as explained in the following pages.**

**Safeguards:** During the interim governance period the following will hold true.

1. Our church will remain an autonomous Southern Baptist Church
2. There will be no move to dispose of church property
3. Three standing committees will retain leadership and function as specified in our existing bylaws: Trustees, Personnel, Finance.
4. Members meetings will be held quarterly and additionally as necessary to update on progress and gathering congregational input during the re-write of bylaws.

## Governance Leadership Roster

### Board of Directors

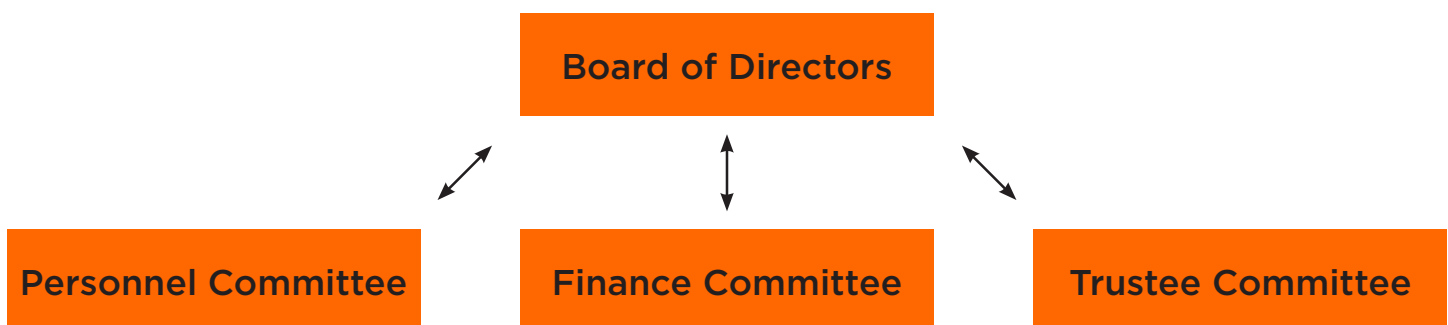
- Lead Pastor
- DOM STL Metro Baptist Association
- Key representatives from inside the church

### Finance Committee

### Personnel Committee

### Trustee Committee

## Sherwood Baptist Church – Temporary Governance Shift



### Board of Directors

- Vision and direction for congregation
- Affirmation of committee decisions/actions
- Watch-care and accountability for lead pastor
- Safeguard of doctrine, discipline and order
- Oversight of membership through shepherding

**Finance Committee**

- Oversight of approved annual budget
- Accountability for financial integrity
- Oversight of church treasurer
- Development and recommendation of annual budget to congregation

**Personnel Committee**

- Care and accountability for paid church staff
- Oversight of policies and procedures for employees
- Consult with Board of Directors on compensation, evaluation and retention of church staff

**Trustees Committee**

- Serve as legal officers of the church
- Evaluate condition of and respond to facility needs
- Consult with Board of Directors on facility needs, issues

**Congregational Affirmation:** The larger body of congregational members will participate in the decision-making process during members meetings through voting on the following matters:

1. Call of the lead pastor
2. Approval of the Annual Budget and Ministry Plan (Each November)
3. Acquisition or disposition of property
4. Changes in the church constitution

**Decisions outside the above will be handled by the Board of Directors in consultation with the appropriate standing committees.**

**Members Meetings:** Regular gatherings of members will be held on a quarterly basis. At members meetings the following reports will be given:

- Board of Directors
- Pastor
- Finance
- Standing committees as necessary (Personnel, Trustees)
- Ministry teams (as necessary)

These gatherings will focus on vision, sharing of accomplishments, ministry needs and updates. Each meeting will allow for member questions from the floor and close with a prayer time.

**Motion:** The pastor liaison team moves that at the May 8th, 2013 Business meeting the present Bylaws be suspended and that the Temporary Governance structure above be approved. Additionally, a new set of bylaws will be developed and recommended for congregational approval no later than one year from the above date.

A town hall forum question and answer session will take place no later than one week prior to the May 8th business meeting when the vote is to occur.

### **What matters will the church continue to vote on?**

1. Call of the lead pastor
2. Acquisition or disposition of real estate
3. The annual budget and ministry plan
4. Changes to the Constitution/Bylaws

### **How were these men chosen to serve on the Board of Directors?**

Following the guidelines given in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, for those holding the office of an overseer, the selected men were recommended for service by the pastor to the pastor liaison team.

After the transition period and upon the adoption of the new bylaws and constitution, we anticipate the Board of Directors would increase to five.

### **How will decisions be made?**

Any decisions that fall outside the above will be decided upon by the Board of Directors and the appropriate standing committees or ministry teams as necessary. For example:

1. Personnel matters such as the hiring or termination of staff would be considered by the Board of Directors and Personnel Committee.
2. Adjustments in the annual budget that do not increase the overall budget but merely reflect adjustments or reallocation of funds within the approved annual budget would be decided upon by the Board of Directors and the Finance Committee.
3. An increase in the annual budget would be reviewed by the Board of Directors and Finance Committee and brought to the church members for approval as it represents a change in financial responsibility for the entire congregation.
4. A request for missions support would be reviewed by the missions Team and recommendation sent to the Board of Directors for approval.
5. Necessary repairs to the facility would be reviewed by the trustees who would operate within their authority and financial approval per approved budget categories. They would notify the Board of Directors of their recommendations and actions and their decision would not require a vote from the Board of Directors

### **How will the congregation give input on matters important to the life of our church?**

Quarterly members meetings will be held in order to both listen to and inform the church family of relevant and important information pertaining to the life and mission of our congregation. Members will be given time to ask questions and share feedback.

Additionally, any member is free to contact and speak with any of the members of the Board of Directors to ask questions, share comments, concerns or express needs.

### **How will the Board of Directors serve the congregation?**

Each member of the Board of Directors will take an active role in serving the congregation through leading and serving not only as a director but a member of a standing committee or ministry team.

The Board of Directors will have “skin” in the game in that they are not separated from the real life of ministry in the trenches. They will model what it means to lead well by serving well.

### Do the Board of Directors vote and decide by majority rule?

Following the model given in Scripture, the Board of Directors will make decisions by consensus. When guided by the Holy Spirit and having the same mind in Christ, there should be unanimity in the decisions they make. When there is not unanimity they will study, pray and seek the will of God together until consensus is achieved. Unity and harmony in the church begins with the leadership. (Acts 15:28, 1Corinthians 1:10, Ephesians 4:3, Philippians 1:27, 2:2)

### How long will the Board of Directors be in place?

The present proposal provides for a year suspension of the bylaws and the drafting of new bylaws within one year from the date of May 8, 2013. The Board of Directors will serve for that time period or until new bylaws or constitution documents are drafted and approved anytime within that one year time frame. If a Board Member resigns or becomes unable to fulfill his duties due to any circumstances an additional Board Member will be nominated/recommended by the remaining Board of Directors according to the qualifications stated above and proposed to the standing committees for approval.

### What happens to existing committees under the new structure?

1. Certain committees essential to the functioning of the church will be retained but will operate as ministry teams rather than committees.
2. Committees not essential to the functioning of the church or whose functions will be absorbed by the Board of Directors will be dissolved.

Committees Retained (Standing Committees)	Committees Dissolved	Committees to become Ministry Teams
Trustees	Nominating	Counting
Finance	Constitution Review	Deacon
Personnel	Church Council	

3. Certain Activities/Activity Coordinators will be combined into new ministry teams which have similar functions.

Activity Coordinator	New Ministry Team
Fellowship, Kitchen	Special Events
Security, Ushers	Guest Services
Deacon, Home Bound, Intercessory Prayer	Pastoral Care
WMU, Rock Hill Food	Missions
Worship, Flowers and Decorations	Worship
Children's Church, VBS	Children's

### What are the differences between ministry teams and committees?

Ministry teams and committees are similar in many respects but different in others. The following table notes some of the differences and similarities:



Committees	Ministry Teams
Do church work	Do the work of the church
Hold meetings/make decisions	Plan and do ministry
Members nominated and approved by outside committee	Recruit, train and develop members on their own
Task oriented	Vision oriented
Majority rules	Consensus rules
Respond to needs	Initiate ministry
Defined and structured	Flexible and adaptive
Ongoing	As needed

A good article on the differences between committees and ministry teams and how they function can be found here: [baptiststart.com/ministry\\_teams.htm](http://baptiststart.com/ministry_teams.htm)

### **How will ministry team members be recruited or assigned? How long will they serve?**

Ministry team leaders will be recruited and placed within areas of gifting and passion and will be empowered to recruit other like minded individuals to serve within their area of ministry. Ministry teams will compose and develop their own ministry vision plans and budget requests as part of an all church annual planning process.

### **Ministry teams will serve in their respective roles for a one year term and will evaluate their participation annually.**

At the end of their terms each year, team members will be asked to complete a self-evaluation. This questionnaire will include these four questions:

1. Am I in Fellowship? — with Jesus
2. Am I being Faithful? — in my place of service
3. Am I being Fruitful? — and seeing “Grace Results”?
4. Am I being Fulfilled? — or is it time for a change in my service?

The team members will then return a reply card to their team leader expressing whether they would like to be considered for another term or if they have interest in pursuing another area of ministry.

It is to be expected that changes will be made from time to time to keep fresh people in places of service, to prevent burnout and to help people experience well-rounded growth.

### **How will planning and communication take place between ministry teams, standing committees and the church at large?**

Annually the board of firectors and all standing committee and ministry team leaders will meet together over a series of weeks to discern vision, direction and pray for our church and the upcoming ministry year. At these meetings key goals and objectives will be discussed and identified.

After these meetings take place the standing committees and ministry teams will gather with their respective members to begin planning ministry for the upcoming year. These plans will include:

1. Key ministry objectives for the coming year
2. Events or initiatives to achieve those objectives
3. Resource requests necessary to fund those key objectives

These teams will present their ministry plans and budgets to one another. A time for questions and dialogue with ministry team leaders and the Board of Directors will take place. The Board of Directors along with the finance committee will set budget parameters and the Board of Directors will then give initial approval to the ministry plans and budgets to be brought before the congregation.

Consideration regarding timing, sequencing, resourcing and calendaring will be part of the approval process.

Once the plans are approved by the congregation all ministry plan dates will be entered into the Church calendar and the financial information into the annual budget.

Teams will then be accountable to the board and the congregation for the implementation of their ministry plans and management of their approved budget.

## Developing a Replant Team

Part of the dynamic in replanting a congregation is changing the way the church makes day-to-day decisions. In many instances, congregations have made decisions at monthly business meetings at which they may have voted on everything from the color of paint for the children's room to the hiring of a custodian. Actions like these could adequately be handled by those in the congregation to whom oversight has been granted.

For a replant and revitalization effort to move forward decision making must change. The congregation still participates in decision making for the church but does so only on a few primary things.

1. Call of the senior or lead pastor in case of a vacancy
2. The annual church budget
3. Changes to the bylaws or constitution
4. Acquisition or disposition of property or encumbrances related to debt

Every other decision is entrusted to the replant leadership team or board of directors. For background on what this might look like in the life of a church replant, we recommend you view the Governance Change Proposal document.

Who should serve on the replant leadership team or board of directors? Often a group like this is the precursor to developing elders. We recommend that those being considered for this role meet at minimum the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-13, which describe elders and deacons.

### Leaders from within or without?

Our experience has shown that when a church seeks to take strides forward, it must have new leadership and renewed leadership. Outside leaders bring fresh perspectives and are not bogged down by baggage and history and are not acclimated to dysfunctional patterns or priorities that grow up inside of dead and declining churches. The dead and declining church needs “fresh eyes” and “fresh ideas.”

Where do you find these leaders?

### Outside the existing church

In putting leadership teams together for replants, we have found that pastors who have demonstrated history in revitalizing or replanting and experienced church planters who led their congregations to self autonomy are great resources for potential team members. In addition, key denominational officials who possess similar experience in working with churches can be valuable assets to this new leadership team.

### Inside the replanting church

It is important not to overlook key leaders that may be present in the existing congregation that is in the process of being replanted. Long time leaders have knowledge and relationship capital that shouldn't be discarded or dismissed simply because they've been with the church through its decline. Often these leaders have hung on because they possess a strong vision and conviction that God wants to do something new within the church. We recommend that these leaders be chosen with care and caution—longevity in a congregation does not always correlate with maturity and wisdom.

## Composition of the potential replant team

- The newly assessed and approved replanter
- A pastor with experience in revitalizing or replanting
- A church planter who leads or has led a church to self-sustainability
- An existing church leader who is supportive of the new direction needed for the church
- A denominational leader (local, state or national)

We recommend obtaining a commitment of two years from each team member and that this team meet, at minimum, monthly but preferably twice a month. In the early days of replanting and revitalizing, a more frequent schedule is necessary to handle the concerns and logistics associated with implementation. As the effort progresses, meetings can be backed down to once monthly.

## Connection with the congregation

It's best if the members of this team can participate in members meetings and attend worship services occasionally in order to speak with and connect with the larger congregation. At minimum, the contact information of each team member must be made available to the congregation.

## *First Baptist Church of Affton*

8751 Mackenzie Road  
St. Louis, MO 63126  
314-631-8750 • Fax 314-631-8752

November 24, 2014

Mr. Jim Breeden  
Executive Director  
St. Louis Metro Baptist

Mr. Breeden:

On Sunday, November 23, 2014, the First Baptist Church of Affton held a special business meeting to vote on the proposal from the St. Louis Metro Baptist Association offer of aide to assist us with our efforts to replant our church. The First Baptist Church of Affton accepted the proposal by 87%.

By accepting the proposal, the First Baptist Church of Affton agrees with all three of the conditions specified by the proposal. Those conditions are:

- 1) A new Pastor or church planter to be called with the financial resources of First Affton, SLMBA, MBC, and NAMB/IMB to start a new type church to reach the changing community. This allows for the history of First Affton and the Gospel to continue advancing on the same corner in the city of Affton.

The First Baptist Church of Affton has elected a search committee and is in the process of actively pursuing a candidate.

- 2) The current Constitution and Bylaws of First Affton be suspended for a minimum of one year. During the year period a new leadership team would have oversight and authority with the exception of the following items which would require full church vote: buying and selling property, annual church budget, hire and fire of Senior Pastor, and changes to Constitution and Bylaws.

The First Baptist Church of Affton has agreed to suspend our Constitution and Bylaws and create a new leadership team consisting of seven individuals. Those members will consist of, the new pastor, three members elected from our congregation, two members appointed from the association, one of whom is trained as a church planter and one of whom is trained as in church revitalization, and the final member will be a volunteer from a larger, successful church. The church accepted nominations for our three members of the leadership team after the vote on Sunday morning. The church elected the three members during the evening service on 11/23/14. Those members are: Jim Kopp, Tony Beddendorf, and Roger Grider.

- 3) The church recognizes and accepts that changes to the ministries of First Baptist Affton are necessary. These changes might include items such as: stopping some ministries, starting new ministries, changing the church name, changes to the facilities, changes in the type of services and style of worship, changes in how decisions are made. The church understands that these changes will be made by or with the direction from the new leadership team.

*“The Church with a glorious past, present and future where everlasting relationships are built.”*

# Vision Leadership Team

Sherwood is a church in transition and in need of focused leadership in the context of a team in order to bring back health and vitality to our congregation. Bringing life back to a congregation is ultimately a work of God who works through individuals. A team focused on discerning God's vision for our church will play a crucial role in charting the course for our church as we seek God together.

## **Vision leadership team description:**

A diverse representative group of key members who serve together as a committed and trusting community in order to discern and implement God's vision for the congregation.

- Not a committee or task force
- Central purpose is to discern together God's vision for the church
- Possess the capacity and willingness to develop community, care and trust
- Serve together as a team for at least one year or until the major objectives have been defined, decided and implementation has begun.

## **General team member characteristics:**

- Cross generational (young and old)
- Men and women
- Long time and brand new Sherwood members
- Those who influence with positivity—not those who seek to influence with criticism or complaining.
- Selfless, humble, gentle
- Committed to Jesus more than their personal preferences
- People of prayer
- Willing to work hard.
- Able to debate, disagree strongly—and remain unified.
- Willing to make difficult and unpopular decisions—in order to lead our church into the future.

## **Specific commitments**

- VLT Team retreat @ Sherwood (TBD)  
Friday 6:00 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.  
Saturday 9:00 a.m. - Noon
- Ongoing meetings (scheduled TBD)
  - » Likely 1x monthly (Sunday post service or Wednesday evening)
- Commit to read assigned resources prior to meetings
- Site visits to local congregations
- Small VLT group meetings in 2-3's with pastor
- Commitment to confidentiality and unity

# New Jamestown Baptist Church Site Visit Assessment

## Visual Condition

- The main church building sets off from New Jamestown Road by a great distance and is served by one long driveway with a marquee sign that is difficult to read when driving by.
- The main church building was built in 1973 and has been updated very little since completion.
- Orange carpet in entryways and in main sanctuary is out-of-date, stained and loose on sanctuary stage.
- Seating is estimated at 200 and the pews are in good condition but out of style due to their orange upholstery
- Typical signage and bulletin boards are in common areas as you would find in a church of this type.
- The lobby space is open with restrooms located on the west side of the building. Facilities are in need of updating.
- A small classroom is located off the lobby and children's and nursery rooms are off to the side.
- No clear directional signage exists in the interior of the building.
- Drop ceiling tiles in the lobby and classrooms show wear and there are some water stains and sagging in some places.
- The main building is currently experiencing a squirrel infestation. A squirrel was present in the lobby during the site inspection. This is a common occurrence according to the trustee who granted access to the church.
- There is clutter, typical of a church of this age and lifecycle, found in each of the buildings.
- A portable sound system is currently used and appears to be in good working order.
- The baptistry is large. It is unknown if it is functional.
- Service panels are located in the back of the main auditorium.
- A choir room is located off to the side of the auditorium and adjoins the children's area.
- Landscaping: The property sits on 9.8 acres and contains several trees that need to be removed, an overgrown dried-up pond area toward the back of the property and a ground mole infestation was noted.
- Parking is estimated to provide spaces for between 90-100 cars and is in fair condition but is unmarked.
- No exterior signage was noted.
- HVAC units are in good working condition and newer.
- It appears that old wiring is present and would need to be evaluated and replaced in the former residence building complex.



## Additional Buildings

- A larger multi-room building sits behind the auditorium.
- Originally a residence and garage, it is composed of small rooms, a kitchen, a fellowship hall area and residential bathrooms.
- This larger building was used for church offices, dinners, a few small classrooms, a youth room.
- A basement area is located beneath the larger fellowship hall room. There were no signs of current water intrusion but slight mold on the drywall over the HVAC ducts.
- Loose tile was noted in the kitchen area. The tile is older and it is unknown if it contains asbestos.
- Inspectors found mold on the walls of the kitchen area. No remediation has been done. It was estimated by inspectors between 10-20K to remediate. No official estimate has been obtained.
- A pole barn sits on the back of the lot and is used for storage for lawn tractors and equipment.
- Playground equipment is present and is not in good repair and should be removed.

## General Evaluation

Overall Property Condition: **Fair/Poor**

### Items Requiring Immediate Attention:

- Mold remediation
- Squirrel infestation
- Electrical wiring assessment
- Replacement of carpet
- New roadside sign
- New carpeting throughout the main auditorium
- Restroom update
- Exterior signage
- Property/landscaping clean up
- Removal of playground equipment
- Assessment of roof condition in areas where drop ceiling tiles exhibit water intrusion.
- Assessment of residential classroom/office/fellowship building—many areas in need of update once it is determined that occupancy is permitted.
- Removal of old and out-of-date furnishings, materials and AV equipment.

# Recommendations for New Jamestown Baptist Church

## Introduction

New Jamestown Baptist Church contacted the SLMBA asking for assistance in determining options for their church as the following were true:

- There was a Pastoral Vacancy
- There has been pattern of decline in members and regular attenders
- Church finances are limited
- There are significant facility needs

A meeting was held between Church Leaders, Darren Casper-Acting Executive Director of the SLMBA and Bob Bickford—Chair of the Church revitalization team to discuss options and possibilities pending a site visit evaluation and additional information collected from the Church.

## Findings

- **Attendance** shows a pattern of stability but little growth.
- **Facilities** are in need of significant repairs and upgrades. Rough estimates would be approx. 50-100K.
- **Congregational Composition** is not reflective of the area.
- **Moral:** the people are faithful and have worked diligently, they are in need of hope and a vision for the future.
- **Openness to Change:** unknown, but there is concern over changes that could take place in worship style and programming. The leaders have indicated they would be open to interviewing and calling an African American Pastor.
- **Financials**
  - » Budget: \$92,889.80 for 2014
  - » Cash on hand (as of December 31, 2014): Checking - \$993.23  
Money Market - \$8,535.33
  - » Debt - \$0
  - » Average giving per yr, mo, wk: \$5,200 per month  
\$350 in rental Income per month

## Recommendations/Options

Based upon our assessment of New Jamestown's current situation we recommend the following to the Church for their prayerful consideration.

### 1. Church Merger (Adoption)

- New Jamestown would become part of or adopted by another healthy congregation in the area.
- The Adopting congregation would provide leadership in all aspects of the Church life.
- New Jamestown would deed over property to the SLMBA to be held in trust and financial assets would be given to the Adopting congregation.

- New Jamestown members would be welcome to join the new congregation.
- A suitable adopting congregation would need to have the following:
  - » Geographical proximity to New Jamestown
  - » A regular attendance of 100
  - » Available financial resources to make repairs to the facilities and a plan to repair existing property in need of attention.
- The SLMBA would serve to introduce a potential Adopting Congregation to New Jamestown and walk with both churches through the process.

## **2. Closure and Sale of Property**

- New Jamestown would set a date for closure
- Facilities and properties would be deeded over to the SLMBA
- Assets from the sale of the property would fund Legacy Church Planting Efforts in the St. Louis Metro area.
- New Jamestown Church leadership could formulate options for a portion disbursement of cash assets to missions as they deemed.