

ASSEMBLIES OF GOD THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

CREATING A STRATEGIC CHURCH GROWTH PLAN FOR ABUNDANT LIFE OF
THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD IN COLCHESTER, CONNECTICUT

A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY PROJECT COMMITTEE
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY DEPARTMENT

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ABSTRACT

Abundant Life of the Assemblies of God, a sixty-year old church in a rural New England community, has struggled with fluctuating attendance. Even after constructing a new facility and changing its name, the church still struggled to increase its attendance. With the Great Commission as the compelling mission, this project sought to develop genuine health and strength at Abundant Life that would ultimately result in numerical growth. To accomplish this monumental task, this project examined the scriptural foundation for church growth and reviewed current literature regarding principles for establishing a healthy and growing church.

This project incorporates numerous internal church surveys and evaluations that helped guide Abundant Life in forming an effective strategy toward church growth. An internal Appreciative Inquiry and a professional survey through Natural Church Development reveal crucial insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the church. Field research, through interviews with effective New England pastors and leaders, contributes pertinent information which Abundant Life will incorporate into its growth strategy. The research also reveals the importance of visitor retention, the key role of leadership and vision, and the power of small group ministry. The academic research, in combination with the field research, provides valuable insight that will assist Abundant Life in the church growth process and provide a helpful tool for other church leaders in New England who desire to lead their church to greater health and church growth.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Growing the church, especially in New England, is a difficult task and only possible when the Holy Spirit provides the energy and brings the people with the proper gifts to the particular church body. It is the same with this project; it is only through God's grace and the many people who contributed to the process of this project that I accomplished this overwhelming task.

My family, especially my wife, Elizabeth, allowed me the numerous hours necessary to conduct research as I spent many hours typing in my man cave and even was mentally distracted for several years. Without their support, it would not have been possible to complete this project.

I am extremely impressed with the support and guidance of the Doctor of Ministry team at the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary (AGTS). Dr. Lois Olena, Project Coordinator, was exceptionally gracious and helpful to me in improving my writing and thinking ability. During the trying times of this project, she seemed to be nearly always accessible via e-mail. Thank you, Lois.

I was equally impressed with Susan Starkey who helped me become a better writer through her wonderful editing ability. I know that often, in the later days of this project, I put her in a severe time crunch, yet she never once complained.

Dr. Richard Lafferty, my Project Adviser, and Dr. Douglas Oss, my Biblical Adviser, were a great help, showing me how to use Scripture as my guide for building the

Church—not that I did not already use Scripture, but they taught me how to really rely on God’s Word for direction. I am thankful to Dr. Lafferty for motivating me when I desperately wanted to quit.

This project, from the beginning, has always been for the benefit of the Abundant Life of the Assemblies of God in Colchester, Connecticut. I am exceptionally indebted for their understanding and eagerness to help with this project. The church’s assistant pastor, Rev. Shirley Ellis, and my church board gladly took up the slack when I was away attending a class or deep in the writing process.

For all of the people in the church who prayed and expressed concern for my progress, I am appreciative. To everyone who participated in the project’s surveys and brainstorming sessions, without you, this project would not have had a purpose.

Lastly, I am thankful for the professors and fellow students of the Doctor of Ministry program. You profoundly changed my life.

My prayer is that the Holy Spirit will take this humble tool and use it for His glory to increase the health and effectiveness of Abundant Life in Colchester, Connecticut.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Many people commonly believe that the New England region presents a difficult place to start a church; that challenge increases, however, when one takes a small struggling church and desires to lead it to growth and health. The New England states as well as other areas of the United States face a spiritual hardness. James Emery White, in *Rethinking the Church*, quotes George Barna who says that churches experienced “a staggering 10 percent drop in the average number of adults attending services at a Protestant church between 1997 and 2001 alone.”¹ According to the Gallop Poll, “Forty-two percent of Americans say they attend church or synagogue once a week or almost every week, while 43 percent say that they seldom or never attend church.”² According to an article entitled, “U.S. Religious Landscape in Dynamic Flux,” in *Christian Century* magazine, 28 percent of adults have left the faith of their childhood for another religious tradition or no religion at all.³

The North American church, and especially the New England states, are stagnating or even losing ground; they desperately need to experience health and spiritual

¹James Emery White, *Rethinking the Church: A Challenge to Creative Redesign in an Age of Transition*, rev. and exp. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 20.

²Gallup, “Church Attendance Lowest in New England, Highest in South,” Gallup.com, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/22579/church-attendance-lowest-new-england-highest-south.aspx> (accessed November 9, 2009).

³John Dart, “U.S. Religious Landscape in Dynamic Flux,” *The Christian Century* (2008): 16.

growth. “A special Gallup Poll analysis of more than 68,000 interviews conducted over the past two years shows that reported church attendance is highest in the southern states, in Utah, and in certain Midwestern states, while church attendance is lowest in the New England states, Nevada, and other Western states.”⁴ Without a doubt, the churches in New England need renewal. Despite saying all the right words and putting on the right programs, many churches have experienced decline and stagnation. As Robertson McQuilkin wrote: “The greatest mystery is why those who are charged with rescuing the lost have spent 2000 years doing other things, good things, perhaps, but have failed to send and be sent until all have heard the liberating word of life in Christ Jesus.”⁵

Most pastors lack the knowledge and the tools to grow the church during these spiritually difficult times. The Barna Group identified three competencies with which leaders struggle yet desperately need in order to succeed in church growth. Barna concludes that church leaders often perform poorly in three specific behaviors: (1) failure to negotiate agreements that maximize benefits at minimal cost, (2) inability to attract new resources to the organization—especially human and financial capital, and (3) failure to develop and implement individualized developmental plans for emerging leaders. This includes a deficiency in nurturing robust relationships with existing colleagues and demonstrating sufficient care and attention to their needs.

Specifically, leaders are most likely to have difficulties developing the tangible resources (e.g., funds, personnel, facilities) needed to accomplish plans, developing the skills of other leaders to facilitate more effective organizational

⁴Ibid.

⁵Robertson McQuilkin, “Lost,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1992), Section A, page 154.

performance; and developing the systems required to efficiently complete the tasks at hand.⁶

Although excellent church growth literature abounds, most of this literature does not come from Southern New England. Although small geographically, the Southern New England District of the Assemblies of God (SNED, which encompasses Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island), is eminently diverse. Therefore, solutions to church growth problems in one area of SNED may not necessarily apply to other areas. Abundant Life of Colchester, Connecticut needs to discover a strategy that works for Colchester.

Chapter 1 describes the ministry context, the problem within that context, and the purpose of the project to address the problem. In addition to providing definitions for key terms related to the project, the latter half of the chapter describes the proposed project—including its methodology, scope, and specific phases.

The Context

I am an ordained Assemblies of God (AG) minister in Colchester, Connecticut, which is part of the Southern New England District (SNED) of the AG. In 1996, I began serving as the pastor of the Colchester Assembly of God. After some growth, the church commenced an expensive lengthy church building program in 2004 on a large tract of land across town. Simultaneously the church changed its name to Abundant Life of the Assemblies of God (simply called Abundant Life). The church leadership team had no idea how drastically these two adaptations would change the church; although the church

⁶The Barna Group, “Study of Leaders Identifies Their Weaknesses,” Barna.org, <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/17-leadership/319-study-of-leaders-identifies-their-weaknesses> (accessed November 9, 2009)

is nearly sixty years old, in many ways it performs and behaves like a new church.

The town of Colchester, based on the 2000 census, has a population of 15,303 and a median household income of \$64,650.⁷ For the most part, the local people are well-off financially; the median house values at \$159,500.⁸ The town has experienced growth, and the current estimate of Colchester's population is 17,150.⁹ Colchester, like most New England towns, is heavily Catholic with a strong Congregationalist church.

Colchester is not culturally diverse. Caucasians comprise 94.5 % of the aggregate populations. The other races break down like this: African American 1.4%; Native American 0.40%; Asian .06%; Hispanic or Latino 1.9% and .07 from other races.¹⁰ The church draws from several local towns, making it more diverse than the town, but it is still largely Caucasian.

According to the 2000 census, Colchester has 5225 households of which 43% had children under the age of 18 living with them. Married couples living together comprised 63.9% of the population; single-parent mothers account for 9.2% of the households. The average household size was 2.75, and the average family size was 3.14. The church itself has a great variety of ages; however, the average person is under 40 years of age and has a few children.

A large dissonance exists between the culture and values of Abundant Life and the town of Colchester. Like most Assemblies of God churches, Abundant Life reflects

⁷"The Skinny on 06415 (Connecticut)," ZipSkinny: <http://zipskinny.com/index.php?zip=06415> (assessed November 12, 2009). These statistics are based on the 2000 census.

⁸"Colchester, CT," Zip-Codes.com <http://www.zip-codes.com/city/CT-COLCHESTER.asp> (assessed November 13, 2009).

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰ Colchester, CT Overview: <http://www.epodunk.com/cgi-in/popInfo.php?locIndex=9123> (assessed January 4, 2010)

conservative and biblical values; however, in years gone by, the church developed a poor reputation because they separated themselves from the town. The church people never contributed to the needs of the community because they viewed the town government and the other churches as evil. In addition, the church congregation split a few times, which also contributed to the church's bad reputation. Since the church resides in Colchester, reparation of these hard feelings became a top priority.

Problem

Colchester Assembly of God had an up and down history; it went through three building programs, but it also suffered several church-wide splits. When I arrived at the church, after graduating from AGTS, the church had a Sunday morning attendance of about 25. The church grew quickly as people, who had earlier left the church, returned either out of curiosity or out of the need for a church. Church attendance grew to an average of about 110 people. However, the church parking lot could only legally hold enough cars for about fifty or sixty people. Although the sanctuary could comfortably accommodate the people, the small Sunday school space limited church growth.

In 2004, the church purchased sixteen acres¹¹ and sold its current facility to a retail establishment. During the construction of the new building, the church met for worship at the local high school. Although the school's administrator treated us very well, it was still a difficult shift. The church seemed empty, and our new temporary sanctuary was nearly ten times larger than needed. At this point, keeping the morale up among the people was a crucial task. To accomplish this, the leadership displayed

¹¹To give an idea how large this land is, the church owns the largest piece of land of any church in town and the surrounding areas. The Catholic Church has nearly ten times the amount of people. Our previous building only encompassed .41 acres.

updated pictures of the construction, and the people gathered for special events and prayer meeting on the new grounds.

The land purchase was very exciting. The church paid \$129,500 for nearly sixteen acres of land. For years, the land sat empty because of an adjacent, illegal landfill that resulted in the condemnation and destruction of at least one house. In the past, Babcock Pond, located next to the church, turned orange because of the poisons released from the landfill; consequently all prospective buyers turned away. The church struck a deal with the owners: the church would dig a well; if the well proved healthy, we would buy the land, if not, the church would cancel the deal. However, after drilling the well, the water was deemed very drinkable. The town leaders assured me that contamination from the illegal landfill would definitely affect areas on the opposite side of the property. Since the property is so large, the place where the landfill existed is over one thousand feet from the church.

In 2006, the church changed its name and moved into the new building. Due to a lack of finances, the church was not able to complete the basement. The southern part of the U.S. experienced some violent, decimating hurricanes, which caused a dramatic rise in construction materials, even in the northeastern region of the country. If the church had waited even a year to build, the increased costs would have prohibited completing even the main level of the building. Inability to complete the entire construction could have demoralized the church, but the church board assured the people that, in time, they would complete the basement area. After two years of construction, in 2008, the church finally fully completed the building.

A new building brings tremendous change. Many new people came to the church, but simultaneously some older people passed away, and some long-term leaders moved to other geographical locations. Consequently, the church has a new leadership team, and everything about the church feels like a young church, although it is nearly sixty years of age.

Approximately 180 people call Abundant Life their home church, and although to many people the church appears to be growing, the overall number of people attending the church has not changed significantly. Average Sunday morning attendance is anywhere from 110-130 people. During the two-year construction period, the church experienced some major cultural changes, going from an overly-busy church to suddenly only having a Sunday morning worship service. During the building construction, the church developed a system of small groups to give the people needed fellowship and discipleship. From the beginning, the congregation understood that the church would not return to a regular Wednesday night format. Five years later, more adults attend the small groups than the previous Wednesday night church service. However, small group ministry has not been the vehicle for numerical growth the church had hoped for.

The building project was overwhelming. Not only did the construction take much of the leadership's time and energy, it depleted us financially. Suddenly, the church had a \$1.3 million mortgage to pay which required laying off several staff members. While this layoff could have devastated the church, each of those staff members continued in their positions. After a few years of merely surviving, the pastor yearned for more and commenced on this project in order to lead this struggling church and make it successful. If Abundant Life of the Assemblies of God in Colchester, Connecticut is to see numerical

and spiritual growth, it must discover the best methods and principles to achieve an effective long-term growth strategy. This research and ministry intervention of this project focuses to that end.

Definition of Terms

This project will implement several key terms, which need further clarification:

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) - AI is an organizational tool to discover what works best in an organization and then to build on those findings. According to Mark Lau Branson, “The thesis of Appreciate Inquiry is that an organization, such a church, can be recreated by its conversations. And if that new creation is to feature the most life-giving focuses and forms possible, then the conversations must be shaped by appreciative questions”¹²

Growth - Church growth and church health go together. Church growth refers to more than numerical growth. If the church is healthy, it will naturally grow in numbers just as a healthy child grows and matures. In this project, growth refers to several issues: (1) numerical growth, 2) seeing people grow in a living and vibrant relationship with the Savior, and (3) developing people into effective disciples of Jesus Christ.

Missional - When a church becomes ingrown, leaders give in to the temptation to simply maintain the church. Instead of taking seriously the church’s call to the Great Commission, the church exists to maintain the church building, pay the bills, keep the members happy, and elect church officials; in short, they become no different than a country club. A missional church takes its charge to become a missionary to its given missional field. Indeed, the church must win the lost to be effective both in its local

¹²Mark Lau Branson, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2004), xiii.

geographical area and in missions, both home and foreign. When a church sets its sights on its mission, the church people tend to mature faster and grow in grace as they seek their place in the mission.

Assimilation - a system that the church develops in order to retain visitors and new people who come to the church. The average church member is more concerned about reaching out to his or her friend who normally attends, rather than welcoming the nervous visitor. Abundant Life works diligently on preparing materials for new visitors and contacting them after the service.

The Purpose

This project seeks to discover and implement an applicable strategy of growth so that Abundant Life can evangelize the lost people of Colchester. The purpose of this project is two-fold: (1) to guide the Abundant Life leadership into a challenging growth strategy and (2) to lead the congregation into church health.

Description of the Proposed Project

Scope of the Project

This project will explore the best ways to bring numeric growth to Abundant Life in Colchester, Connecticut. Since leadership is so significant to church growth, a vital motive behind this project is to improve both my skills as a pastor and to further develop the skills of my leadership team. Much emphasis will be on the health of the church, since church growth is closely related to church health.

In order to ascertain the health of the congregation the leadership team will take the church through some key evaluations, including, a two-week Appreciative Inquiry (AI) session, a second Natural Church Development (NCD) survey, first done in 2007,

and a personal, staff developed questionnaire. Our motive for taking these surveys is to determine both the weaknesses and the strengths of the church and in turn to build an appropriate church strategy to meet those weaknesses and to further develop our strengths.

A further research methodology will focus on discovering what other churches in New England are doing to develop their churches. This will be accomplished by interviewing several Southern New England of the Assemblies of God pastors who lead growing churches with a similar size and location as Abundant Life.

This study will not include interviewing successful, non-evangelical churches because of theological discrepancies. Also, another limitation is that the work will continue years after this project is completed. As the vision of the church matures and as new people come in, the church culture will change and further work will need to be made to make the church successful.

This project, "Creating a Strategic Church Growth Plan for Abundant Life of the Assemblies of God in Colchester, Connecticut," will assist Abundant Life in developing effective strategies for growth and provide information from which other churches could learn.

Church growth, in many ways, depends on determining the felt needs and values of the church community. Research for this project will investigate both the biblical-theological foundation and the general literature on various church growth models in order to enable Abundant Life to elect and implement a suitable church growth method.

One of the most exciting aspects of the project will be allowing congregational participation. During the early part of 2009, the adult membership of the church will

participate in an Appreciative Inquiry session with the goal of identifying the effective ministry and programs currently in place within the church. In so doing, the people will have the opportunity to voice their complaints and be part of the process of identifying what was working and build on those aspects. Toward the end of 2009, the same group of people will participate in a staff developed evaluation and in doing so submit their recommendations to the pastor and church board. While the first evaluation, the Appreciative Inquiry will focus on identifying the positive aspects of ministry within the church, the second inquiry, the staff developed evaluation, will allow people to identify the challenges.

During November 2009, I will preach a three-week series based on the research from this project. These messages will identify specific things the church needs to implement in order to grow. On the third week, the sermon series will culminate with an evaluation and planning session with the adult attendees in the church. After the meeting, I, along with the church board, will evaluate and analyze the data to determine the needs of the church. This process will assist the leadership team in formulating a more accurate vision and direction for the church.

Since first-generation Christians comprise a large portion of the church, their input on the worship style, the length of the service, and, especially, my preaching will be of particular interest. The survey will ask some tough questions such as, “What prevents you from inviting your friends?” During the course of this project, the project moderator will periodically present applicable research to the board. This project will specifically focus on the current adults and teenagers of the church with the overall outcome of enlarging the vision of the church. The purpose of this strategy session will be to

investigate the health and the needs of the local church body and give the church board the tools it needs to effectively evaluate and guide the church in growth. Some of the key issues to be addressed at the seminar-strategy session will be the kingdom of God and the local church, recent research on New England, transformational leadership, becoming a missional church, the Great Commission, the priorities of the church, and the importance of community, discipleship, and church health.

Many people in the congregation are new to Pentecost, and only a few of the congregants grew up in a Pentecostal church, consequently, though the congregation never openly discusses their confusion on spiritual gifts for fear of appearing unspiritual, I believe much confusion remains on how to use the spiritual gifts in the worship service. The church board needs to feel the pulse of the people on this issue and as the leadership team ascertains where the people stand on this issue, they can establish discipleship methods for the church. The church must unite in the belief that Jesus saves and that God alone empowers his church through the ministry of the Holy Spirit; once the congregants unite on these two core beliefs, they will have the right ingredients for establishing a strong, vibrant, and healthy church.

Phases of the Project

The project will consist of four primary phases: (1) research, (2) planning, (3) implementation, (4) evaluation, and (5) writing.

Research Phase

The research phase will address three specific areas of research: (1) a biblical-theological literature review, (2) a review of current literature related to church growth, and (3) field research.

The biblical and theological research material will pertain to the following topics that will guide Abundant Life in building a proper plan of growth. In order to be effective and united, the church must understand its purpose and call and its God given mission. Since so many people in the church are new to Pentecost and, in fact, to a relationship with Christ, the congregation must understand what God expects of the church. The church must unite around the biblical priority of evangelism and discipleship. Although literature abounds on evangelism, the priority of this practice and lifestyle will be researched according to the Scriptures. Abundant Life, made up of mostly first-generation Pentecostals, has a strong need to understand Pentecost, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

As healthy children grow, so does a healthy church grow. The general literature research will probe into the following areas pertinent to church growth. This project will focus on the development of church health, rather than on numerical growth:

- Church Models: This project will research the gamut of church models from seeker-sensitive to revival churches, as a means of helping the leadership of Abundant Life determine how they should govern the worship services. At this particular point, it is safe to conjecture that the church secretly experiences division over the culture of worship in the church.
- Missional churches: As the church clarifies its vision, the focal point will be the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20).
- Small Group Ministries: Small groups play a vital role in both church health and church growth. Currently, adults have two options: a choice of five Sunday school

classes, each lasting twelve weeks, or a choice of five small groups that meet throughout the week in various locations.

- Transformational leadership: The development of leadership within the church is crucial if the church desires to grow. A healthy church does not rely solely on the leaders of the past but rather develops new lay leaders among the men, women, and young people of the church.
- How to effect change: Church growth inevitably requires change, which most people do not like. A pastor can come up with wonderful new plans for a church, but change, if implemented improperly, can easily crush the church. Many a pastor has returned from an exciting church conference only to attempt a transformation that the church was not ready to embrace.

The third area of the research phase for this project—field research—will specifically analyze a few successful churches in Southern New England with a makeup analogous to Abundant Life in ethnicity, economics, leadership style, and general flavor and style of ministry.

One of the vital parts of this project is to research the unique characteristics of church growth in New England. I will conduct interviews with several local pastors of growing churches, approximating the same size as Abundant Life. In addition, the interview with Rev. Bill Button, Director of Church Development for the Southern New England, should provide helpful insights. The desired goal is to acquire from these interviews new ideas that will attempt to answer several tough questions. One of the toughest questions will be, “Why is ministry more difficult in New England than in other areas of the United States?”

Planning Phase

The planning phase will involve preparation for three primary activities: (1) a two-day Appreciative Inquiry event, (2) a survey to discern the health of the church and its perceived needs, and (3) interviews with local pastors. After researching the best methods for Appreciative Inquiry, I will plan a meeting with the adult Sunday school class on two consecutive Sundays. I will first make sure the teachers of those classes are informed and invite the adults to the activity. At a church board meeting, I will explain the process to them and have them list several categories they wish to investigate, (See Appendix F) remembering that at this stage we are looking for the positive parts of the church. From there I will come up with the discussion questions. Two weeks in a row I will announce to the congregation about the session, urging them to attend. Since our Sunday school takes place after the morning worship service, and because we plan to hold the Appreciative Inquiry sessions in the sanctuary, I will assign several people, after the morning worship service, to quickly arrange the sanctuary chairs into circles of ten.

Second, an important overall evaluation of the church will be the result of the first church-wide meeting. This evaluation will take place on the last Sunday of the three-week series pertaining to the research of this project. The evaluation meeting will be held immediately after the Sunday morning service, during the regular Sunday school hour. I will prepare a survey to help identify the culture and values of the church and then conduct a Strategic Planning Session in the fall of 2009. The assistant pastor, Shirley Ellis and I will come up with church categories we are interested in investigating. Then we will come up with twenty-five questions to help us understand what people think about the church structure, how they behave, what their opinions are on music, preaching

and the mission of the church (See Appendix H). I will set Sunday school aside, inform the teachers, announce it from the pulpit, and even put a notification in our church email newsletter. The purpose of this survey will be to discern the health and felt needs of the church.

Finally, a third evaluation, Natural Church Development survey will serve to help us discover the strengths and weaknesses of the church. Since the church conducted an NCD survey on two previous occasions, it will be very interesting to see the progress made by the church during the intervening years. With this survey, the church must be prepared to see that they have lost ground in other areas. I will contact Rev. Michael Wiles, authorized to administer the NCD survey, and schedule him to attend. We will hold the twenty-five-question survey and the NCD at the same session. NCD will only survey thirty people, so we will only survey adults who were out of High School.

Third, during the spring and fall of 2009, I will interview a few local pastors of like-faith who have experienced church growth. First I contacted Rev. Brad Whipple, pastor of Seaport Community Church in Mystic, Connecticut and agreed to a meeting in his church. Next, I contacted Rev. Bill Button, director of Church Development for the Southern New England District. I designed a series of questions, but Bill and I agreed, we might change the agenda as the interviewed progressed. From there, I called Rev. Michael Wiles, a nationally appointed church consultant, and we set aside 45 minutes for a phone interview. I used a recording device so I would not miss any good quotes. Lastly, I contacted two other respected pastors of growing churches: Rev. Marios Elinas, pastor of Valley Shore Assemblies of God, and Rev. Scott Shemeth, pastor of Christian Life Church in Kensington, Connecticut. I made phone appointments with both and using the

same set of question, planned to speak to them. After the interviews, my church board will receive a report on these interviews and the final church-wide evaluation and strategy session will incorporate this information as well.

Implementation Phase

The implementation phase will follow the stages described below:

In spring to the fall of 2009, I will call and visit certain respect church leaders to investigate ideas for local church growth. In November of 2009, I will conduct a Strategic Planning Session with Abundant Life membership, after we have viewed the results of the various surveys. This will not stop with this project, so I will design an ongoing growth plan for Abundant Life to take place both at the evaluation-planning meeting in November. Ultimately, however, the church board and the pastor will hammer out the final growth plan.

The church board and I will implement various church growth concepts as deemed appropriate. I will immerse myself in church growth literature, and the plan is for the current church leadership to implement many progressive changes based on this project's research. Each monthly leadership board meeting will incorporate a time for formulating plans and vision for the congregation. Chapter 4 provides a summary of this process.

The first planning activity is to prepare a two-day Appreciative Inquiry event to help determine what is working well within the church. This event will take place during the Sunday school hour with all adult classes present. The larger group will divide into smaller groups of five to six people so they can discuss various questions provided by the moderator. For instance, the groups will discuss how the church assimilates new people

into the Fellowship and identify what people find most inviting about the church. These events will take place in spring of 2009.

Evaluation Phase

The evaluation phase will include the following items: first I will analyze data from the spring and fall 2009 surveys taken by the church. The purpose behind evaluating the results of these surveys is to discover both what is working at Abundant Life and the current challenges of the church. The Appreciative Inquiry process will inform the leadership team as to what the church is doing right so it can build on these strengths. After the two-week Appreciate Inquiry survey is concluded, I will list a summary of the positive comments made under each category. Then the church board will work with the results, building on the church's most effective areas and looking to simplify the church so we do not waste precious energy on our weaknesses.

The Natural Church Development (NCD) survey and the church-wide evaluation will address the need for change. After the NCD survey is professionally tabulated, I will bring the church's minimal factor to the church board, and we will spend the year 2010 attempting to make this one minimal factor a strength of the church.¹³ The church board will make new plans based on the need of the minimal factor.

One of the evaluations for the church-wide meeting will result in refreshing a previous Natural Church Development Survey (NCD) taken in 2007. The goal of the NCD survey is to discover the church's minimal factor.¹⁴ By strengthening this category,

¹³NCD identifies eight quality characteristics of a church. Whatever area the church scores the lowest is identified as the "minimal factor." This low area is keeping the church from true health.

¹⁴ A minimal factor is the lowest score out of eight categories. This low score indicates the area that is doing the most to limit health growth in a church.

the church should become a healthier church. According to the NCD survey taken in 2007, the minimal factor was small groups.

The NCD survey measures “the church’s relative health in eight areas that have been demonstrated to have a clear correlation with healthy church growth known as Quality Characteristics.”¹⁵ These characteristics, which follow, measure the accompanying questions:

Empowering Leadership—To what extent is the ministry of the leaders focusing on equipping other Christians to serve? **Gift-Based Ministry**—To what extent are the tasks in the church distributed according to the spiritual gifts of individual Christians? **Passionate Spirituality**—To what extent is the spiritual life of our members characterized by prayer, enthusiasm, and boldness? **Effective Structures**—To what extent do our decision-making processes, operating procedures (official and unofficial), and board and committee structures facilitate rather than hinder the fulfillment of our church’s mission? **Inspiring Worship Service**—To what extent is attending our worship service an inspiring experience? **Holistic Small Groups**—To what extent do our small groups meet the real life needs of members in a holistic way? **Need-Oriented Evangelism**—To what extent are the forms and contents of the evangelistic activities related to the needs of those you are trying to reach? **Loving Relationships**—To what extent are the relationships of the members of this church characterized by a high degree of love and affection.¹⁶

Finally, once the personal interviews with local pastors/church leaders are complete, I will and make a summary for the church leadership, with the thought of developing some new ideas from these churches. I will share all of the information from the surveys and interviews in several ways: first I will share specifics to the church board, I will preach a three-part sermon series to the congregation for the purpose of vision-casting (See Appendix H), and I will use the sermons to present long-term goals for the

¹⁵“The Natural Church Development Survey: What Does it Measure?” Living Stone Associates, <http://www.living-stones.com/ncdmeasure.htm> (accessed November 9, 2009).

¹⁶Ibid.

church. As mentioned, we plan to work all year on developing our minimal factor, Gift Based Ministry, working toward a future NCD survey.

Writing Phase

The last phase of this project is to capture the information in a written format. Chapter 2 will present the biblical-theological review, and chapter 3 will present the general literature review. Chapter 4 will provide a complete description of the field project, and chapter 5 will offer a written summary of the project, including both evaluation and recommendations for the church leadership and for ongoing research in this field.

Conclusion

*This project will contribute to the health and growth of Abundant Life of the Assemblies of God as well as to the increase of spirituality within the church. While the project will directly impact Abundant Life, it could potentially strengthen other churches within the Southern New England District who work and pray toward a similar mission.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to research the Bible to discover the motives and methods for church growth applicable to the strategic planning of the growth statistics indicate that the church in New England is not effectively accomplishing the mission of Christ in the world. Current research by David T. Olson in *The American Church in Crisis* demonstrates that only 9.1 percent of American people attend an evangelical church on any given Sunday.¹ Olson further states, “In no single state did church attendance keep up with population growth.”² Although some churches are growing, apparently this growth reflects a continual shuffling of church attendees. One church grows at another church’s expense.³

The Lord’s mission to reach a lost and dying world is the greatest calling. As Bryon Klaus, president of the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, poignantly stated, “God’s eternal plan was to have a community of people who expressed in particular contexts the reconciliatory purposes of His redemptive character.”⁴ Ultimately, understanding the mission Jesus intends to accomplish through His Church should be central to any church leader’s reason

¹David T. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 29.

²Ibid., 37.

³Ibid., 101. Olson states that the Pentecostal church is growing in forty states, though with small numbers.

⁴Bryon Klaus, “Biblical Theology of Ministry” (Class lecture, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, MO, February 2, 2005).

for being. Every church leader must be driven by Christ's mission for the Church and desire to become a missional leader.

Abundant Life in Colchester, Connecticut needed biblical clarification regarding the vision and purpose of the church. Prior to this project, two distinct points of view were evident within the church. The zealous and overly demonstrative people on one side viewed the church as something to be enjoyed. On the other side, people desired a more contemporary worship style and displayed genuine care for outsiders. Some of the influential members of the church desired a revivalist church atmosphere where people linger around the altars. The other half wanted to be an efficient and friendly church that makes an impact on the surrounding communities. This bifurcation has not caused animosity; indeed, the preferences seem hidden to most people. Nevertheless, these prevailing perspectives certainly hindered growth within the organization by incorrectly diverting energies and resources. The church leadership and pastor were equally divided in their own thinking, which perhaps caused the real problem.

While current leadership was desiring to see the church grow, long-time members resisted growth because they valued the intimacy of a small church. Naturally, the attitude of the long-time members kept the church from growth.⁵ The biblical principles presented in this chapter will help the leadership of the Abundant Life church effectively develop the congregation into what God intends for it in Colchester.

The Mission of the Church

The term "Church" comes from two Greek words: *ek*, meaning "from, out from," and *kaleo*, meaning "call." Thus, the verb *ekkaleo* means to call, to summon as by a herald; "the

⁵In order to maintain closeness within the church yet do away with the growth-stifling desire for intimacy among the entire church, we developed a series of home groups. The goal was to allow small groups to meet the need for fellowship and yet allow the church to grow.

noun, therefore [*ekklesia*], means the resulting assembly, congregation, and those summoned.”⁶ (Acts 5:11, 9:31, 1 Cor. 11:18) The early concept of the Christian congregation was patterned after the Jewish synagogue, but this term is only used one time in the New Testament to designate a Christian congregation.

We see this development from the Hebrew word *qahal*, often translated “assembly” that appears 123 times in the Old Testament (Exod. 12:6, Ps. 22:22). The verb root for *qahal* means to assemble without regard to purpose, but the Niphal brings the concept of a group assembling together, to make war, to ask for idols, and for worship (2 Chron. 20:26). Though *qahal* can be translated a number of ways, it is “especially an assembly for religious purposes”⁷ (Micah 2:5). “Usually *qahal* is translated *ekklesia* in the LXX, but in thirty-six instances it is synagogue.”⁸ The word is translated in the NT by the English word “church.”⁹

Defining the Church’s Mission

Before defining the Church’s ministry and organization, one must consider its nature and understand its functionality and organization. Craig Van Gelder, addressing disgruntled leaders, stated, “It is my conviction that we need to move beyond trying to find the next church that will help us become successful one more time. We need to rediscover something more basic of what it means to be the church.”¹⁰ Klaus aptly reminds believers that identifying the mission of God

⁶Denis W. Vineyard and Donald F. Williams, *The New Testament Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament*, The Complete Biblical Library, Delta-Epsilon (Springfield, MO: World Library Press, 1990), 334.

⁷Ibid, 790.

⁸Laird R. Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Volume 2: (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 790.

⁹Gregory A. Lint, ed. *The Old Testament Hebrew-English Dictionary*, vol. 21 of The Complete Biblical Library (Springfield, MO: World Library Press, 1999) 307.

¹⁰Ibid., 24.

for the Church enables leaders and lay people to face difficulty in ministry. When parishioners fall asleep during the preaching of the Word, when church conflict erupts, or when the body of believers face financial difficulties or budget problems, church leaders can stay on course because the mission of God for the Church is secure. The mission of the Church is God's mission; therefore, church leaders can depend on God to support the mission of the Church.¹¹

Van Gelder distinguishes between "mission" and "missions." The Church and its mission are not distinctive entities but speak of the same reality and the church is much more than a human organization. Understanding that the Church is missionary by nature encourages a holistic way of thinking about mission. Van Gelder states that "This unique nature is the result of the work of God's Spirit in the World."¹² The Spirit created the Church to fulfill a specific mission; the Church, as the people of God, was created by the Spirit to live as a missionary community. God initiated the mission; He defines the mission, sustains the mission, and will consummate the mission. According to John Stott, the Bible reveals God as a missionary God; He creates a missionary people and is working toward a missionary consummation.¹³

Writing on the mission of the church, Van Gelder stated, "Its role in the New Testament church is clear from the story of the expansion of the Christian movement in the first-century world."¹⁴ Over the past two centuries, the definition of missions took on a specialized meaning. "This period witnessed the rise of the modern missions movement, with scores of mission

¹¹Klaus, class lecture.

¹²Abundant Life considers itself to be a missions-minded church, but the concept of being a missional church is new to them. I have attempted to lead them into moving away from thinking of missions as a distinctive department in the church, to being the very nature of the church. This change will not occur easily.

¹³David Zac Niringiye, "The Nature and Character of God's Mission," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* no.180280 (January, 1996): 66.

¹⁴Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000) 29.

societies coming into existence that worked through or alongside, the church in the West.”¹⁵

Many churches define the term as a department in the church with the assigned task of supporting professional world and home missionaries; however, the mission of the church should not be “one among several essential tasks of the church.”

In recent years, ecclesiastical leaders have understood the mission of the church “to be inherent within the very nature of the church.”¹⁶ The Lord bestowed on the Church a mission, so the concepts are one and the same; the church and its given mission speak of the same reality. Van Gelder noted: “The church is to participate fully in God’s mission to all creation.”¹⁷ When the church leader realizes that God gave the church a mission, all activities, goals, and plans will revolve around this proper understanding.

The task of the Church is to make God’s wholly loving and just character known to a blind world. God’s mission is universal and holistic. He has perfect goodness and, therefore, He alone loves humanity with a perfect love. As a just God, no evil exists in Him. He alone is impartial—rewarding good and punishing evil. He has chosen to make himself approachable. One cannot discover God by learning facts and information about Him—nor can believers take credit for the knowledge they possess about God. People can only know Him through a personal encounter.

Although believers will never fully understand God and His mission, God has promised to reveal His will by the Holy Spirit. As David Zac Niringiye wrote, “We must, as learners and pilgrims, grasping and being grasped by His revelation”¹⁸ seek His will for the Church. “The

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., 30.

¹⁷Ibid., 31.

¹⁸Ibid., 66.

Church is never triumphant. It is always militant, i.e., under pressure.”¹⁹ One day it will be finally victorious, the day when God sets up the Kingdom of God. The tough challenge lies in being committed to learning and obeying God’s summons to the mission, whatever it may demand. The first step involves understanding God’s nature and character. “The words of Jesus must become the words of the Church.”²⁰

Mission of Reconciliation

God’s purpose for the Church is to win back the world He so loves (John 3:16). The mission and call of the Church was originally the Father’s mission; the Son, in turn, carried out the mission while on earth. Jesus chose His disciples who later called their own disciples. He gave them the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20), the Church’s clarion call to reach the world for God.

The Church was created by God to be sent to preach the good news of the Kingdom of God. The Church, God’s ambassador, brings a lost world into reconciliation with God. Paul affirms this in 2 Corinthians 5:18-19:

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.²¹

The mission of God, often referred to in Latin as *missio Dei*, is “the redemptive reign of God as inaugurated by Jesus and was integrated with an understanding of the Triune God

¹⁹Gerhard Kittel, ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 534.

²⁰Olson, 210.

²¹All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New International Version.

seeking to redeem all of creation.”²² God calls the Church to fulfill the mission of Jesus today. Since the Spirit created the Church, the Church’s ministry flows from the work and nature of the Holy Spirit. The Church is God’s presence in the world by the Spirit, and everything flows out of the character of God. Craig Van Gelder describes the Church as being at war against the forces of evil in a great power encounter: “The unmasking of the powers that have been disarmed means that the church’s ministry is a power encounter between God and the forces of evil.”²³

The local church experiences motivation once it recognizes God’s calling to send redeemed people into the world. Christ “has been calling out from the world a people for himself, and sending his people back into the world to be his servants and his witnesses, for the extension of his kingdom, the building up of Christ’s body and the glory of his name.”²⁴ The Church’s passion must be “to proclaim God’s love for a world of sinners and to invite all men to respond to him as Savior and Lord in the wholehearted personal commitment of repentance and faith.”²⁵ Jesus commanded the church to obey him and so it must reach a lost and dying world: “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love.” (John 15:10 NIV)

Churches must focus on reconciliation between God and humanity. The Greek word for sin, *ἁμαρτία*, in its various forms is found over 170 times in the New Testament. “The New Testament concept of *ἁμαρτία* is not that of merely a mistake, but a deliberate, conscious, and culpable act.”²⁶ The Church has the answer for humankind’s separation from God; therefore,

²²Van Gelder, 53.

²³Ibid., 135.

²⁴Ibid., 76.

²⁵Ibid., 77.

²⁶Ibid., 130.

identifying and unifying under God's mission will enable the Church to extend genuine and life-changing reconciliation to a lost and dying world.

First to the Jew then to the Whole World

Scripture demonstrates that God's love extends to all people groups. In Genesis 12:1-4, God promised to make Abraham a blessing to all nations. God promised to use the Jewish people to reach the world, and through them, to bless the entire world. However, "over the centuries Israel had fallen into the trap of believing that its election by God made it his favorite. In other words, Israel never thought they could jeopardize their standing with God."²⁷ Despite their misunderstanding, God planned to reach the entire world through Israel, and use the church as the means to continue God's mission. Walter Kaiser reminds the reader "God also specifically calls the Gentile members of the body of Messiah to make Jewish people spiritually jealous (Romans 11:11)."²⁸ That jealousy will bring Israel to the Messiah.

Nehemiah provides an example of Israel's belief in the nation's exclusivity when the Jewish people were rebuked for marrying non-Jews in Nehemiah 13:25. "They thought that other people were lesser breeds, those outside of the law."²⁹ This was not a racial issue, but spiritual. Nehemiah and his supporters wanted to avoid Solomon's sin of marrying foreign women, that had led Israel into idol worship. One could see how a Jewish person could misunderstand Jesus when He told the Canaanite woman that He was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel (Matt. 15:24). Clearly, Jesus intended to reach the whole world, yet implemented the principle of

²⁷Arthur F. Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God's Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 134.

²⁸Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser, *To the Jew First: The Case for Jewish Evangelism in Scripture and History* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2008), 17.

²⁹Glasser, 136.

reaching out “to the Jew first” (Rom. 1:16). God chose Israel out of all the nations of the world for the purpose of spreading the news of God’s love to the whole world (John 3:16).

The early Jewish church in the New Testament nearly fell into the same misunderstanding by restricting their preaching to Israel until God made it clear to them His plan that they fulfill their ordained mission as a light to the nations, sharing the good news that Jesus came to save all people of the world (John 3:16). Jesus also commanded His 500 Jewish missionaries to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19). Acts 1:8 instructed the disciples to take the gospel message to the whole world, beginning with Jerusalem. God further demonstrated His concern for all people on the biblical holiday of *Shavuot* (the Day of Pentecost) in that though 120 Jewish disciples spoke in other tongues, Diaspora Jews, proselytes, Cretans, and Arabs from over fifteen nations (most gathered in Jerusalem for the festival) heard this message, and no doubt took the gospel message back to their homelands (Acts 2:4-5, 9-11).

Persecution, as evidenced in the book of Acts, caused the Church to spread throughout the known world. Even Gentile believers assisted in this dispersal of the gospel. The biblical record concludes, in Revelation 7:9, that a great multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language are praising God in heaven. Israel is God’s chosen people, through whom He sent the Messiah, providing salvation to all people of all nations.

The Preeminence of the Kingdom of God

In order to understand the mission of God, one needs to understand the importance of the term “kingdom of God.” According to Van Gelder, “Jesus established the meaning of the Kingdom of God as God’s redemptive reign.”³⁰ The Greek word for kingdom, *βασιλεια*,

³⁰Van Gelder, 75.

primarily means “God’s kingdom, domain, rule, and reign.”³¹ This concept is not only found in the New Testament, but also occurs throughout the Bible. The kingdom of God is the message that death, Satan, and sin are defeated through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Jesus called people to receive the Kingdom, and those who responded became heirs of the promises made to Israel. The Apostle Paul clearly affirms this concept: “This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 3:6). “This means that the church is nothing less than the missionary people of the Kingdom of God.”³² Believers are custodians of the good news of the Kingdom.

The kingdom of God points to the defeat of satanic power because through the cross Jesus defeated the power of darkness. (Acts 26:18) While the Church is not the Kingdom, it serves as an agent of the Kingdom through which believers receive spiritual blessings. God’s reign is characterized by holiness, love, and justice. (Matthew 5:48) Christ’s Kingdom extends over all human structures and efforts. His domain rules over every aspect of the believer’s life; believers must, therefore, learn to submit to God’s Kingdom rule. Everything must be judged on the basis of whether or not it facilitates the ministry of Jesus in His Kingdom rule.

The Church Carries on the Mission of Jesus

The Church’s mission must follow the Master’s mission. In *The American Church in Crises*, David Olson points out five purposes of the mission of Jesus. The first aspect of Christ’s mission was to be the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world on the cross. Olson, speaking of

³¹Thoralf Gilbrant and Tor Inge Gilbrant, *The New Testament Greek-English Dictionary*, The Complete Biblical Library, Alpha-Gamma (Springfield, MO: World Library Press, 1986), 538.

³²Glasser, 225.

the Jesus' love, quotes C. S. Lewis: "God has paid us the intolerable complement of loving us, in the deepest, most tragic, most inexorable sense."³³

Second, the Lord's mission was to fight the decisive battle with Satan, triumphing over the grave, Jesus won the victory over death and Satan. "The apostles' preaching and the whole New Testament reveal that from Jesus' birth until his resurrection, he was locked in a decisive confrontation with Satan."³⁴

Third, Christ's mission was to authenticate himself as the Son of God through the resurrection. "The resurrection is the event that secures and anchors the work of Christ."³⁵ The resurrection is the message of joy, hope, and victory, the first fruit of God's ultimate triumph over the enemy. The mission of the Church can only be properly carried out when one grasps the true meaning of Jesus' resurrection and His soon return. God calls the Church to live the resurrected life here and now; the Church is supposed to serve as a force against death and destruction.

Fourth, Jesus' mission entailed challenging earthly principalities and powers through His ascension, which was related to His future return in both the judgment and the final redemption. In light of the promised Judgment Day, the Church must reach a lost and dying world because as Olson warns, "The judgment day is the moment of absolute despair for those who choose an existence apart from the presence of the Lord Jesus,"³⁶ but it is the Blessed Hope for Christians. Jesus empowers His Church to be the light to a lost world (Matt. 5:14) and at the same time to

³³C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: HarperCollins, 1940), 29.

³⁴Olson, 201.

³⁵Ibid., 202.

³⁶Ibid., 203.

prepare both the Church and those who will answer God's call to prepare for His return (Heb. 6:2).

Fifth, the mission of Jesus focused on establishing His Church as the new people of God through the Day of Pentecost. The Church does not replace the Old Testament people of God but rather fulfills the Abrahamic Covenant, which used faith to mark out the people of God under both the Old and New Covenants.³⁷ The Church is a fellowship, a *koinonia*, where God's love flows in daily life. Through the Church, justice and righteousness are made present in the world. God forbids believers from ignoring this community because it is not simply a social club or other distinctive community. The love exhibited in the Early Church gave believers boldness in the face of adversity and opposition.

As His final command, Jesus instructed His disciples to see evangelism as their very reason for being. "If the disciples truly love their Lord, they would carry out his call to evangelize."³⁸ Thankfully, Jesus did not send them out in their own strength; He gave them his authority. "They were both authorized and enabled for the task."³⁹ Jesus gave them no geographical restriction with regard to the commission; the disciples were to take the message to the whole world. Olson adeptly summarizes the Church's call: "If the church is to be faithful to its Lord and bring joy to his heart, it must be engaged in bringing the Gospel to all people."⁴⁰

In summary, the mission of the Church is seen through the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus. He equips His Church by defeating the powers of evil and empowering them by His resurrection. He is coming again in judgment: to those who are His, this day of Judgment will be

³⁷Ibid., 204.

³⁸Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1994), 1052.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid., 1054.

a happy occasion, but to those who reject the Lord, it will be a day of misery and as a result, the Church needs to not waste time, but to learn and choose God's priorities for the Church.

The Priorities of the Church

The task of the church leader is to search the Scriptures to learn God's concepts regarding how to govern and lead the church. Scripture purposefully presents a broad perspective on how to "do" church; therefore, church leaders must acquire a clear vision of God's mission for the church through learning the concepts, ideas, and theology of the church from Scripture. As students of God's Word, church leaders should recognize the consequences, which exist for creating substitutes for God's true ministry. The church, the visible presence of Jesus in the world, needs to understand that "the church never exists in a vacuum."⁴¹

Church leaders must explore biblical teachings in order to understand the identity of the church, taking care not to compromise biblical truths. In addition, church leaders—by seeking the guidance of the Spirit—translate these truths and make God relevant to the context and culture in which the church exists. As the expression goes, "Theology is written in the trenches."

Experience and Scripture both demonstrate a great variety in how the church fulfills its biblical mission. Whatever the approach, the Pentecostal Church must carefully implement the scriptural mandates which pertain to the mission of the church. The priorities of the Church can be reduced to four Greek terms: *kerygma*, *koinonia*, *diakonia*, and *martyria*.

⁴¹Van Gelder, 41.

People of the Word: *Kerygma*

“Preach the word” was the charge given to Timothy 2 Timothy 4:2. Paul knew that “the life, growth, health and the strength of the church depended on expository preaching.”⁴² Or to put it another way: the church needs the power of preaching, the Greek noun, *kerygma*. “By preaching is manifested the logos which brings to man eternal life that was promised.”⁴³ Though the world might view preaching as ineffective and foolish, (1 Cor. 1:21) it is God’s chosen method to proclaim His love and His coming wrath to those who reject His chosen path. Many pastors get discouraged with their preaching and leadership abilities, but a Pentecostal pastor must realize that the Holy Spirit is the power and strength that must be built into the fabric and culture of the church. Craig Keener, speaking of believers in Scripture who did not seek evangelism in their own strength but who had a radical dependence on the power of God, said, “They turned their world upside down.”⁴⁴ To turn the world upside down must be the passion and heart of every church leader.

The Pentecostal Church must stress the presence of the Holy Spirit in order to be effective in preaching. “Pentecost is the guarantee that the Jesus of the Gospels is the Jesus who continues his ministry and power by the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁵ This means the Holy Spirit does the true work behind preaching; he alone convicts, illuminates and instructs the church through the Bible. The Bible graphically demonstrates how foolish it is to attempt preaching with only the human

⁴²Stephen F. Olford and David L Olford. *Anointed Expository Preaching*. (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998.) 69

⁴³Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 716.

⁴⁴Craig S. Keener, *Gift and Giver: The Holy Spirit for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 68.

⁴⁵Ibid., 4.

spirit. For instance, Samson carried out great works with the Spirit of God, but once the Spirit left him, he attempted ministry on his human strength and failed miserably (Judges 16). Similarly, after the Spirit of God fell in Acts 2, Peter's preaching became bold and effective (Acts 19:2-40).

Pentecostal ministry must continue to preach to the lost and teach the Church about the need for holiness and power. Indeed, "nothing is so intolerable to fallen humanity as God's holiness, and nothing is so intolerable to God as human sinfulness."⁴⁶ The ministry of the Church is a power encounter between God and the evil one and the ministry of the Church is based on God disarming the enemy through Christ. God expects repentance, submission, and humility.

This preaching of the Pentecostal Church must stress a mighty revival of the Holy Spirit baptism. Many believers have a shallow understanding of God, and so Pentecostal leaders often focus on those who have never received the Holy Spirit; yet even those who have previously received the experience need a new and deeper experience with God. All believers need a mighty baptism in the Spirit, as there is so much more to God than believers have experienced. As Klaus aptly said, "The baptism in the Spirit is an un-mined treasure."⁴⁷ Church leaders must mine that treasure.

People of Community: *Kononia*

In Scripture, the concept of the Church as a community is of great importance. The Greek word *kononia*, community, occurs nineteen times in the New Testament and means "having or holding all things in common."⁴⁸ God's Church is not merely about individuals but on the

⁴⁶Glasser, 251.

⁴⁷Klaus, class lecture.

⁴⁸Erickson, 1055.

formation of a new type of community built by the Holy Spirit. As the body of Christ, the Church exists as a social community, both human and spiritual, and as a result, it behooves the Church to learn how to work together in community. The Church is the people belonging to God; therefore, believers comprise the Lord's community (1 Pet. 2:9).

The New Testament uses approximately ninety-six images to refer to the Church. Of those, several New Testament terms help clarify the idea of the Church as community. In Romans 7:4, Paul uses the term "body of Christ" to describe how believers now carry out the work of God, 1 Peter 2:9 illustrates the "people of God" imagery: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." Peter wrote that this new people are made of living stones being built into a spiritual house (1 Pet. 2:5). Paul, when speaking of Jesus' ascension, used the imagery of the body of Christ, with Christ as the Divine Ruler over all the Church (Eph. 1:20-23). The body of Christ is made up people Paul calls "saints." Van Gelder says of believers as saints: "The essential idea of the church as a fellowship of saints is that we now experience God and each other in reconciled relationships based on what we share in common in Christ."⁴⁹

When the community of believers comes together in this supernatural *kononia* and unity, they experience greater unction; so individuals should not distance themselves from community but commit themselves to it. Everything must be done to maintain the unity of the Spirit; believers cannot say they love God yet hate their own brothers (1 John 4:20). For as Dietrich Bonhoeffer rightly wrote, "When brothers stop speaking, they stop hearing from God."⁵⁰

⁴⁹Van Gelder, 111.

⁵⁰Klaus, class lecture.

Believers must learn to get along, to forgive, to be highly ethical, and to reach out to a lost world. “This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother” (1 John 3:10). Unless the Church experiences this supernatural unity with the Holy Spirit in its midst, it will be like any other human organization; the Church needs God’s power so it can carry out His acts.

People of Service: *Diakonia*

Another way of viewing the Church is to look at the works of service she is called to do in the place of Christ. “Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18, NASB). Also, the Church is called to accomplish God’s work. Eph. 2:10); as the Church is the body of Christ, it serves as His hands, feet and voice to a needy world (Eph. 4:12). The ascended Jesus, the Lord of that compassion and care, “is to be lived out this world by the church.”⁵¹

Compared to their liberal counterparts, Pentecostals once lagged behind in doing social works. Olson wrote, “In the early days of the modern evangelical movement, compassion was an expected part of the church’s expression of Christianity. Unfortunately, in the last generation, that commitment has diminished among evangelical churches.”⁵² Pentecostal believers viewed caring for the poor as unspiritual. Consequently, Pentecostals have been good at orthodoxy, proper belief, but poor in orthopraxis, doing proper acts of love.

Jesus told His disciples: “As the Father has sent me I am sending you” (John 20:21). The Church can only accomplish God’s mission by doing things His way. God is concerned about

⁵¹Olson, 216.

⁵²Ibid., 215.

evil, oppression, devastation, and today's injustices because He wants to make people whole. Consequently, the Church must not let the world surpass it in societal reform.

Jesus, the gentle shepherd who loves and cares for His sheep, now calls His Church to continue this work of servanthood. The Lausanne Covenant affirms that “the Church’s mission of sacrificial service and evangelism is primary ... [and that] world evangelization requires the whole church to take the whole gospel to a whole world.”⁵³

In being people of service, the Pentecostal Church must willingly reach out to every culture, race, and ethnicity; believers are called to welcome all people into the local fellowship. Van Gelder believes that when the Church understands that mission is the work of God, it will no longer be divided along race or ethnic lines: “The people of God will be formed around a different identity, which transcends race, ethnicity, and nationalism.”⁵⁴ William Seymour, leader of the Azusa Street Revival in the early 1900s, illustrates how the Pentecostal movement removed the racial and ethnic lines. As journalist Frank Bartleman—an eyewitness to the early Pentecostal outpouring—said, “The color line was washed away in the blood.”⁵⁵

Service takes many shapes. “Social concern includes the condemning of unrighteousness as well.”⁵⁶ Many Old Testament prophets emphatically spoke out against the evil and corruption of their day, as did John the Baptist—and it cost him his life. “The church is to show concern and take action whenever it sees need, hurt or wrong.”⁵⁷ The Church must not lose its voice.

⁵³Thom S. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth: History, Theology, and Principles* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993), 149.

⁵⁴Van Gelder, 109.

⁵⁵Frank Bartleman, *Azusa Street*, Centennial ed. (Plainfield, NY: Logos Publishers, 2005), 51.

⁵⁶Erickson, 1058.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 1059.

People of Witness: *Martyria*

Reaching the lost and dying world is paramount to the mission of God. The Greek word *martyria* is found thirty-two times in the New Testament and means “testimony” or “witness.” *Martyria* speaks of superhuman testimony concerning Jesus: “he bears witness to himself as the central point of the Christian message”⁵⁸ (John 3:11; 8:14) The Church must give witness “which not only informs, but corroborates, a testimony born by a witness who speaks with authority, of one who knows (John 5:34)”⁵⁹ The Church and its mission are not two distinct entities but rather the same realities; it must accomplish its God-given mission and communicate the Good News of Jesus.

James Emery White states that the New Testament model for evangelism or witness is the communication of the Christian faith through contextualization, which means that the message of the Christian faith should be presented in a way that makes sense to the person hearing it. White asks the compelling question of whether or not the conditions and attitudes that created successful evangelism in the past are still in place today. For instance, few people welcome the strangers who participate in door-to-door evangelism. Today, in New England, this strategy is no longer effective. To add to the problem, “72 percent of Americans now deny the existence of absolute truth, and few have confidence in the historical accuracy or ethical authority of the Bible.”⁶⁰ To be people of witness, believers must be spiritual innovators.

⁵⁸William F. Arndt, Wilbur Gingrich, John R. Alsop, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: A Translation and Adaptation of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch Zu Den Schriften Des Neuen Testaments Und Der Übrigen Urchristlichen Literatur*, 4th Rev. And Augm. Ed., 1952. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 494.

⁵⁹Spiros Zodhiates and James Strong, *The Complete Word Study New Testament: King James Version* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1991), 920.

⁶⁰James Emery White, *Rethinking the Church: A Challenge to Creative Redesign in an Age of Transition*, rev. and expanded ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 44.

White states that the Church serves as a bridge builder to this culture. Consequently, each local church must faithfully adhere to the message of the gospel, while establishing a place where seekers can discover new faith. Whereas many successful models exist to carry out the Lord's mission, White encourages the development of a "seeker-hopeful" environment, which incorporates the creation of atmosphere where seekers can come to a relationship with Christ. He contrasts the seeker-hopeful approach to the seeker-sensitive model where "the whim of the seeker is what determines the theology and direction of the church."⁶¹

People of Prayer: *Proseuche*

Prayer in the New Testament (Gk., *proseuche*) occurs thirty-nine times and is a holy calling given to each Christian (Rom. 9:1-3; Gal. 4:19). Prayer is the most important evidence of true Christian faith (1 Tim. 2:1); it is the very mark of a Christian (1 Tim. 5:5; cf. Acts 9:11).⁶² The Holy Spirit commanded that believers in Jesus pray (1 Tim. 2:1), and Jesus provided the model (Luke 22:45). The programs of the church do not change lives; rather it is the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit that accomplishes true ministry and this begins with prayer. The Early Church was a praying church and recognized their lack of strength and as a result relied on God to accomplish His work through them. Undoubtedly, the early believers had private prayer, household prayer, and temple prayer at the hours of worship (Acts 1:14; 3:1; 4:21-31; 12:12).

The Bible points to certain priorities given to the church by the Holy Spirit and when the church discovers them and works toward accomplishing them, it will lead to a happy, healthy church. Equally imperative to church health and success is to discover what Scripture has to write about the Church's characteristics.

⁶¹Ibid., 53.

⁶²Colin Brown, ed. *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1980), 861.

Characteristics of God's Church

Since the Church is God's, it behooves God's people to discover, from Scripture, the characteristics of the church. Not only will this give direction to the church leader, it will encourage the church during the hard times that comes to every congregation. Klaus provides six foundational points regarding important characteristics of the church: 1) the church is of eternal importance, 2) the church is a community that is charismatic in origin, 3) the church is a community that has visible local expression, 4) the church is a community that is a steward of God's grace, 5) the church, as a community, demonstrates in its life together the reality of what it proclaims, and 6) the church is a community where lives are planted and maturity takes place.⁶³

The church leader need not face the daunting task of ministry alone because the Holy Spirit provides all the gifts and all the power for effective ministry. In an era where church leaders have access to incredible tools, such as technology, instant access to outstanding teachers, seminars and great education, but the church faces impending failure without an intimate relationship with the Lord. The pragmatic demands of present-day ministry often overwhelm the vision and even dull spiritual discernment. Consequently, church leaders need to schedule times for reflection and breaking away from the routine to seek a new infilling of His Holy Spirit. Klaus warns: "Ministers crash and burn because they distance themselves from the vine."⁶⁴ Leaders should access the great tools available, but continuously keep a fresh vision of what the church is and how the Holy Spirit wills to empower the church.

Regarding the church, Douglas Oss insightfully writes: "As the church moves forward into the next millennium, surrounded by an increasingly wicked world, it is essential that true

⁶³Klaus, class lecture.

⁶⁴Ibid.

believers receive the Lord's own mantle: His anointing with the Spirit and Power."⁶⁵ God's ministry only takes place when accomplished His way. Pentecost guarantees the fulfillment of God's mission through the Church. The Holy Spirit gives leaders power when they line up with what God is doing because God cares deeply about His Church, His ministry, and the walk of believers.

Pentecost restores the basic hope that the world encompasses more than the visible realm but also what believers can be in Christ. As believers connected to Spirit empowerment, each person carries the call to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19-20). Jesus' call applies to current believers because He is the same "yesterday, today and forever" (Heb. 13:8). Therefore, believers can trust God to accomplish His ministry through them in their current life context.

Pentecostal church leaders carry the responsibility of guiding the worship service in an orderly manner. Scripture indicates that the church must concern itself with the visitor and maximize that window of opportunity. This, however, does not mean that ministry to the established believer is minimized but Scripture teaches that the Shepherd first reaches out to the lost and needy. "I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent" (Luke 15:7).

Pentecostal leaders must maximize the opportunity for people to come to Christ and make the church a powerful place for people to enter the Kingdom of God. Christ said: "If you love me you will obey me." Leaders must obey Christ by reaching out to a lost and dying world

⁶⁵Wayne A. Grudem, ed., *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 283.

with the only true message of hope because, “when we value lost people as Jesus did, outreach will happen, and more people will sing, ‘I once was lost, but now am found.’”⁶⁶

Leighton Ford, in the preface to White’s book, *Rethinking the Church*, identifies the United States as the “largest mission field in the English-speaking world.”⁶⁷ Glasser stressed the importance of the Church as God’s tool to reach a lost world. In other words, when believers labor within the church, they participate in the King’s business (Rev. 19:16).

Of Eternal Importance

Though the Church is universal, the local church still matters to God. Since He passionately cares about what takes place there, leaders have an obligation to build it for His glory. The Church is Christ’s bride and of utmost importance to Him. Given that the Church is the most important structure in the universe, church leaders must not work for the acclaim of people, but for the Lord’s reward. From God’s perspective, every individual in the church is important. For this reason, competition between churches is evil, and leaders must be careful not to criticize another church or denomination.

God originated the mission of the Church because it is in His character. As Klaus puts it, “Jesus enfleshed the mission”⁶⁸ (John 1:14). God passionately cares about the mission of the Church; consequently, church leaders can walk with confidence knowing that Jesus will always be involved in its ministry. Isaiah writes about the heart of God when he cries out: “I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’ and to the south, ‘Do not hold them back.’ Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth” (Isa. 43:6). Sloppiness or laziness within church

⁶⁶Mathewson, Steven D., “How Much Do Lost People Matter? The Answer Determines Your Intensity,” *Leadership Journal* XXI, no. 3 (2009): 97.

⁶⁷Ibid., 8.

⁶⁸Klaus, class lecture.

leaders should not exist because each church belongs to the Lord and creates a reflection of His glory. Church leaders should realize that they do not work for the congregation or denominational leader, but rather for the Lord Jesus Christ (Col. 3:23).

Charismatic in Origin

The Assemblies of God (AG) has a wonderful history and heritage; however, neither the AG nor any other church should ever rest on its laurels. The Church finds its power in the Holy Spirit, not its history. As Jesus said, “Whoever believes in me, ... streams of living water will flow from within him” (John 7:38). For too long, the Church has relied on human tactics and strategies alone rather than on the one source that would guarantee success: the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:22). The church should be filled with disciples who move in the Spirit of God, walk in the spiritual gifts, and come prepared for church yet who know how to work in the power of God according to His direction. The church, biblically speaking, can only grow through the power of the Holy Spirit as when Ananias laid hands on Saul to receive the Holy Spirit so that he could fulfill his God-given mission (Acts 19:7).

Church leaders can experience the temptation of offering human resources to the service of God, believing that their natural abilities, gifts and talents can adequately substitute God’s resources. In Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus warned that not all works done in His name are really His mission. While personal power, charisma, or modern technology can accomplish many things, the Lord often rejects human success as having no Kingdom legitimacy. In the Gospels, as Klaus points out, human efforts do not even receive a pat on the back!⁶⁹ Church leaders need to constantly allow the Lord to inspect, search, and refine the mission of the church. Church structures should be analyzed to make sure the Holy Spirit governs the church (Acts 15:28).

⁶⁹Klaus, class lecture.

The Church must strive to create an environment where believers can use their gifts (1 Pet. 4:10). Nearly any Christian can discern between the godly and the demonic; however, church leaders must be equipped to determine the difference between God and the intelligence and cunning of fallen human beings. In other words, when church leaders exhibit godly discernment they know when something is of God.

Christians must strive to live a Spirit-filled life in order to accomplish the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20); the burden of the Great Commission is not on the church or the church's leaders, however, but on the Lord Jesus, we are his body to carry out his mission (1 Cor. 12:27). Jesus stressed that the Spirit is the Helper of the community of faith when He said, "I will not leave you as orphans" (John 14:18). The music or various programs of the church do not constitute its strength, but instead gains strength by being connected to the power of the Holy Spirit. Today's church leader must learn how to discern God's purposes for the Church.

A Community with Visible Local Expression

Though a person cannot see God until he or she dies, the Church is God's visible presence on earth. Through it, the world sees God and experiences His love and power. Although people might not read the Bible, they do read the church, especially its leadership. People cannot see Jesus at this time, but they can and do see His body, the Church. This places a heavy responsibility on the church leader because the church, established through the power of the Holy Spirit, is the visible expression of God which the world will watch (1 Tim. 3:15).

In order for the local church to grow, attendees must develop a deep appreciation for the Church worldwide. The local church is a visible sign of the invisible Church. The best visible proof of the gospel is the way the visible church works; that is, the world sees the invisible

Church through the lens of the visible church. David Olson writes: “Jesus’ message of hope requires a tangible presence, a physical body, to retell and reenact the story.”⁷⁰

A Steward of God’s Grace

As stewards of God’s grace, both believers and church leaders must make learning to discern the Spirit’s voice a top priority. God sends his Spirit into the church (Rom. 14:17) and empowers the Church through his Spirit (1 Cor. 12:7). To be a steward of his grace means God sends grace to the Church through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and the Church stands in the place of God to do the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20).

A Community Demonstrating the Reality it Proclaims

The church, as a community of believers, must demonstrate, through its corporate life, the reality of what it proclaims. In *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God*, Gordon Fee discusses the central role of the Holy Spirit in the church and the believer. He points out the necessity of the power of the Holy Spirit for living an ethical life. At times, church people tend to view the fruit of the Spirit as less important than the gifts of the Spirit. However, Fee clearly demonstrates that the church needs both. Fee indicates that Paul expects “Spirit people to exhibit changed behavior.”⁷¹

Believers need to handle people, as well as financial and ethical situations in a proper, God-honoring manner and lead the world in doing good works and influencing moral change. Paul, when speaking to the Corinthian church, scolded them for not acting like adults: “You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men” (1 Cor. 3:3)?

⁷⁰Olson, 209.

⁷¹Gordon D. Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 107.

The Spirit of God helps the Church do what is right and just, in the same way Jesus did and continues to do. The government or other secular organizations should not take the lead in making society a better place; this is the church's mission. Jesus came to present the whole gospel, which means Jesus cares about every aspect of life. For too long, the Church has said one thing but done another; now it must lead, not in word only, but also through its actions. God cares deeply about a person's salvation; however, He also cares deeply about whether or not people have enough food, suffer injustice, or experience love. The church carries the responsibility of bringing God's love, understanding, and power into the present world, of truly demonstrating the love they profess. Tragically, in many cases, the world teaches the church how to live rather than the church teaching the world how to live.

A Place of Maturation and Stability

The church creates a community where people experience stability and maturation. Maturation occurs in the life of believers through the assistance of the spiritual leaders God places in the church, as listed in Ephesians 4:14-16. Church leaders carry the responsibility of making sure believers pass the Great Commission to the next generation—any new Christian, whether a child or an adult. Spiritual leaders exemplify the height of selfishness if they do not make the people's maturity and growth of utmost important (Jer. 12:10).

On the Day of Pentecost, the Church exploded with new people. Logically speaking, it makes sense to explore what they did and implement it today. The Early Church persisted in listening to the teaching of the apostles. In like manner, believers today must strive to learn something new about Christ and obtain a greater understanding of the wisdom and grace of God. During the days of the Early Church, the Holy Spirit spoke through the teachings of the apostles.

Jesus had promised that the Holy Spirit would teach them things they did not receive from Jesus (John 14:25). In essence, the apostles' teaching clarified the teachings of Jesus.

Spiritual Gifts in the Church

God has empowered the Church with various gifts and sent His Holy Spirit as the director of the gifts. The power and gifts that come to the church in general and to Christians in particular are not only for the individual and personal benefit of the believer, however; God desires that believers use their spiritual gifts within the church for His glory. Super church leaders who grab the headlines should not be applauded. Instead, leaders should focus on building a church where God receives the glory and society credits the church's success to the Lord rather than the people of the church.

Church leaders must ask the following three questions regarding the church and the practices of the gifts of the Spirit in the local church. First, does the ministry experience the gifts of the Spirit, and does the ministry regularly experience the supernatural? Second, does the supernatural facilitate or disrupt the work of the Holy Spirit in community? Church leadership must maximize the opportunity to reach a visitor. Ever since the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, the Church has been concerned that the gifts of the Spirit not cause people to stumble, but rather that they build up the church. Leaders must ensure the genuine moving of the Spirit without going to the extreme of limiting the work of the Holy Spirit, which requires a Spirit-filled leader who personally moves in the spiritual gifts. Third, does the ministry facilitate or hinder witness to those who are not yet reached? The God-given spiritual gifts should build up the body of Christ; unfortunately, some people use the gifts to draw attention to themselves. Correction of this error requires strong yet loving leadership, accompanied with grace. Knowing that the Holy Spirit is in charge of His church provides great reassurance to church leaders.

Most of the adult attendees of Abundant Life are first-generation Christians with a background in either the Catholic Church or mainline Protestant churches. Consequently, they have little understanding of Pentecostal ways and experiences, which results in a great need to preach on the doctrines of the Pentecostal church. Many people do not understand the baptism in the Holy Spirit, speaking in other tongues, and laying hand on the sick.

Similarly, Paul's letter to the Corinthians addresses a young, excitable church. Having recently discovered the power and authority available through the spiritual gifts, at times they misused this power to the detriment of the church. They thought higher of themselves than was warranted. As Gordon Fee notes, "*Glossolalia* was for them the evidence that they had already assumed the spiritual existence of angels."⁷² Paul encouraged the Early Church not to continue in infantile thinking but to become adults in their thinking (1 Cor. 14:20). God's people can use the power of the Holy Spirit to bring God glory or, as the Corinthian church did, misuse this power to glorify the flesh.

Scripture identifies two types of speaking in other tongues. First, believers receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit whereby they receive a special prayer language which helps them pray more effectively. Any Christian can be baptized in the Holy Spirit and speak in tongues. Second, tongues, in conjunction with interpretation, serves as a means by which the church receives a message from the Holy Spirit. Tongues and interpretation is a special gift of the Holy Spirit given by God to those whom He desires to be used in this particular way.

The Corinthian believers perceived speaking in other tongues as super spiritual and as a badge of honor. However, because of their reluctance to follow the correction of church leaders, they simply drove people away from the church, rather than drawing them into its fellowship.

⁷²Gordon D. Fee, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 11.

Fee wrote on the folly of such an attitude: “If so, then not only did the unintelligibility lead to the exclamation of ‘madness’, but so also would the general chaos of so much individualized worship with no concern for the general edification of the body as a whole.”⁷³ They developed an insider’s club mentality, where only those on the inside could understand and enjoy worship.

By no means did Paul dismiss the importance of the gift of tongues. Paul said that he prayed in tongues more than all of them (1 Cor.14:18). Paul knew that God had graciously gifted his Church with various spiritual gifts to effectively operate his Church. As he wrote in Ephesians 4:8, “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.” The Corinthian believers coveted the gift of speaking in other tongues over all the other gifts. Paul defended his own status as a spiritual leader and rejected the way they followed after the spiritual gifts. In 1 Corinthians 14:18-19 Paul writes, “I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.” While these verses help affirm the gift of tongues, they were designed to re-order the Corinthian believers’ perspective regarding the use of the gifts in their assembly.

Evidently, Paul expressed concern for people who attended the worship service as a means of seeking for God. He taught that the gift of tongues served as a sign for unbelievers, not believers, while prophecy served as a sign for believers rather than unbelievers (Rom. 14:22). Paul calls this “clear thinking” and asks believers to express sensitivity and acknowledge the needs of unbelievers who came into the Corinthian church.

Believers at the Corinthian church thought that the gift of speaking in other tongues expressed the achievement of the ultimate spiritual goal. Consequently, everyone spoke in

⁷³Fee, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle to Corinthians*, 685.

tongues simultaneous, which created an environment of extreme chaos. When a visitor, who is not truly seeking after God, sees believers speaking in other tongues without prophecy, they will not understand anything, and according to Paul, may end up mocking the church. On the other hand, if a visitor hungry for the things of God attends the worship service, although he or she cannot understand tongues, God speaks to them through the interpretation, prophesy, and preaching of the Word. The seeker then concludes: “God is really among you” (1 Cor. 14:25).

According to Fee, speaking in tongues can be seen in two ways. For those in the household of faith, tongues serves as a positive sign of the power of God; however, for those whose hearts are hard and refuse to listen, the gift of tongues can be viewed as a negative sign. As Fee wrote, “Uninterpreted tongues do not edify believers; nor do they benefit unbelievers who may visit their assembly. Indeed, the effect would be quite the opposite.”⁷⁴ Uninterpreted tongues would not lead to conviction of sin and repentance. This is why Paul stressed the need for interpretation along with a message in tongues.

In 1 Corinthians 14:21 Paul illustrates speaking in tongues from Isaiah 28:10-13 where the prophet experiences intense frustration because his hearers constantly reject his message. Isaiah prophesied that a day would come when foreign invaders would conquer them and speak to them in a foreign language they could not understand. The rebellious people who would not listen to God, would not be able to understand those who had conquered them. Rebellion has a high price tag.

This Isaiah passage sheds light on Paul’s explanation. People fall into two categories: (1) those who, in their rebellion, will not seek God and repent; and (2) those who do not understand how to seek God, but really want to experience Him. To the first group of rebels, speaking in tongues obscures God’s call, but the second group of seekers discover that God displays His call

⁷⁴Ibid., 677.

through interpretation of the message. This is the reason Paul stresses that prophecy must accompany speaking in tongues.

Similarly, in Matthew 13, Jesus reiterated Isaiah 6:9-10, the often quoted Old Testament passage in the New Testament. God knew their hearts were intent on their own ways and desires, yet because of God's mercy, He preached the message to them in parables. Because of the hardness of their hearts, the people would not interpret the true message of the parables. No one will stand before God and plead ignorance.

The Corinthian believers thought speaking in tongues served as evidence of their spirituality, but their childish behavior and understanding actually caused people to miss the gospel message. Paul admonished the Corinthian believers to stop thinking like children by quoting Isaiah 28:9: "To whom is he explaining this message? The children weaned from their milk?" Isaiah's critics probably spoke this in mockery of his prophecies. What a frightening thought; Paul saw that the Corinthians were in danger of playing the role of those "children" who rejected the word of the Lord and mocked the prophets.

Paul warned that a seeker visiting the church will hear the beautiful worship and experience the message in tongues. When that one hears the interpretation, he or she possibly will feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit and sense the need for a Savior. However, if the same visitor enters the church with a cold heart and, after hearing a message in tongues, resists the Holy Spirit, to that one the message will seem like gibberish and he or she possibly will leave the church mocking the believers. As A. T. Robertson explains by a possible translation to 1 Corinthians 14:23, "They will seem like a congregation of lunatics."⁷⁵

⁷⁵A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 184.

“The word used in 1 Corinthians 14:23 for mad (KJV) means to be furious, insane, and can refer to severe drunkenness or a strong disease and is only used five times in the New Testament.⁷⁶ “In the New Testament *mainomai* is used only to characterize the messengers of God with their unheard of proclamation.”⁷⁷ The non-believers is unable to understand the gift of tongues and rejects this type of charismatic proclamation as frenzy.⁷⁸ Jesus used this word when the people said, “He is demon-possessed and raving mad” (John 10:20). This explains why in the church, tongues are only effective when prophecy is given. “In this case it is viewed as leading directly to the conversion of the visiting unbeliever.”⁷⁹

Paul establishes a number of rules and regulations to bring order to the service. The key to understanding this section of Scripture is the unknown visitor; he or she hears about the power of God and witnesses a demonstration of love. When the visitor experiences the manifestations of speaking in other tongues, one of two things happens: this person either thinks these people are crazy or becomes convicted of sin and acknowledges that God is present.

The Corinthian church was not erroneous to speak in other tongues, but they essentially disregarded the man or woman searching for a relationship with Christ. Speaking in tongues will do nothing for the hard-hearted unbeliever; he or she will just think the church is filled with lunatics. Nevertheless, the one seeking God, here called the believer, will be persuaded of his or her sin. The Bible says the secrets of a person’s heart would be revealed, and that that person would fall down in the presence of God and announce that God’s presence is truly in the church.

⁷⁶H. G. Liddell, *A Lexicon: Abridged from Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English Lexicon* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1996), 484.

⁷⁷Gerhard Kittel, ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 4, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 361.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Fee, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle to Corinthians*, 685.

Some church leaders fear the consequences of disorder within the church service, fearing that a new person or an unbeliever might never return. Paul, in an attempt to bring order to the Corinthian church, instructed that a person should not give a message in tongues unless a person with the gift of prophecy or interpretation of tongues is present (1 Cor. 14:28). Some critics claim that this kind of regulation is unspiritual. Why would God call believers to speak a message in tongues yet implement strict regulations against it?

In matters of spiritual gifts as in all things, the church must be unified under the direction and leadership of the pastor. Some people think restrictions on using spiritual gifts in church should be more strict than in Paul's teaching, especially in the New England society of skeptics where people often value higher, liberal education that is often contrary to Bible-believing Christian. Some churches are fearful of offending highly educated people when the spiritual gifts are in use in a worship service. Other believers stress the need to use the gifts of the Holy Spirit freely and believe Paul's limitation applied specifically to the Corinthian church, not the Church as a whole. Either way, the Pentecostal Church must never be accused of quenching the Spirit.

The person who possesses a spiritual gift has the ability to control the use of the gift and exercise the gifts in an orderly manner. Paul takes this so seriously that he says if one person is prophesying and another person discourteously interrupts the first person, the first person rather than the second person should sit down and be silent (1 Cor. 14:30). Paul concludes that orderly worship is important because "God is not a God of disorder but of peace" (1 Cor. 14:33a).

It is vital that every church leader discern the moving of the Holy Spirit in the Pentecostal worship service. God empowers his church through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in Spirit gifts. Spiritual gifts are a wonderful tool for the effectiveness of the church, leaders need to guide the

church in their proper usage. Since the church is a steward of God's grace, by definition spiritual gifts belong to God, and the church should humbly use them for God to fulfill His mission.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the biblical basis for the mission priorities of the Church, presented its biblical characteristics, and discussed its Pentecostal power. No human organization can match the power and effectiveness of the Church because its author is God. As the local church discovers God's overall plan for the Church and seeks to carry out His ways and methods, it will be a healthy, successful church, even in hard times.

CHAPTER 3

GENERAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter will focus on some of the key issues in contemporary literature regarding effective strategies for church growth and will serve as a research base to help address the needs of Abundant Life, located in the Southern New England District of the Assemblies of God, specifically as they relate to church growth. This project explores literature on how to develop a healthy, missional church. In order to evaluate the health of the church the tools explored will be Appreciative Inquiry and Natural Church Development.

The Goal: Church Health and Growth

Bill Hull, in *Seven Steps to Transform Your Church*, claims: “It’s hard to escape the conclusion but today one of the greatest roadblocks to the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the institutional church.”¹ Sadly, churches often preoccupy themselves with their routines, facilities, and filling their buildings to simply pay the bills; in essence, churches operate from self-centeredness. In today’s church, it takes about 100 adults and one year to introduce 1.7 people to Christ.² Sadly, 50 percent of churches are doing less than that. The church’s best leaders focus on simply keeping the machinery moving instead of

¹Bill Hull, *Seven Steps to Transform Your Church* (Grand Rapids: F. H. Revell, 1997), 7.

²Ibid., 8.

being out on the front lines winning people for Christ where they belong. But as Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “The church is the church only when it exists for others.”³

Hull claims that God has removed His hands from some major Christian denominations. He equally rebukes the evangelical church for losing its heart to reach the world for Christ. The first thing the church needs is spiritual renewal, and without renewal, mission statements, restructuring, or endless strategies will be pointless. George Gallup indicates that only 12 percent of Americans are committed Christians. Twenty-eight percent attend church but are not committed; another 45 percent do not attend church at all. New agers, atheists, and others comprise the remaining 15 percent.⁴ Hull hammers away: “To make matters worse, many such churches are wasting people’s lives, driving pastors out of the ministry and turning away those seeking God.”⁵

If the church in New England is going to succeed in the Great Commission and reach this generation, it will have to adapt its methods without compromising the spiritual convictions of the church. In order to reach out to others with the saving knowledge of Christ, every church must take a hard long look at how they do church and seek God’s direction for the ministry with an eye to the needs of this geographical area. The church will need to update its methods and maybe even change the culture of the church in order to line up to the needs of the unchurched in New England.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., 16.

⁵Ibid.

Updating Methods

As David Olson, in *The American Church in Crisis*, points out, America and the world used to be mostly Christian; now, however, it is post-Christian.⁶ This could be the first generation of people who Christians can no longer assume people know anything about Jesus and His message for the Church. Because of this reality, many churches in America are living in the wrong century. Churches often use outdated methods to reach society with the gospel; if the Church wants to spread the gospel to the world, it must find out the heart and culture of the people it wants to reach.

Not only is the church operating in a post-Christian society, but also a postmodern (instead of modern) one. Olson writes about the uncertainty that characterizes the postmodern world, “There is skepticism and cynicism about over certainty.”⁷ In addition, the world has changed from being mono-ethnic to becoming multi-ethnic.⁸ “The audience for the Christian message has also changed.”⁹ Not only has the audience changed, it might have not have even arrived. As Leonard Sweet writes, “The number of unchurched adults is rising.”¹⁰ According to Sweet, in America, the number of unchurched people in America rose from 27 percent in January 1998 to 31 percent in June 2009.¹¹ Some areas

⁶David T. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis: Groundbreaking Research Based on a National Database of Over 200,000 Churches* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 162.

⁷ Ibid., 164.

⁸ Ibid., 162.

⁹ Ibid., 163.

¹⁰ Leonard I. Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century World* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 39.

¹¹ Ibid.

of the country embrace this change more readily than others. Olson notes that the northern half of the eastern coast serves as one of the greater changers.¹²

To make matters worse society believes the church is unnecessary and no more than a human social order for those who wish to join. R. Kent Hughes comments on the results of such a mindset: “So today, at the end of the twentieth century, we have a phenomenon unthinkable in any other century: churchless Christians.”¹³ Hughes explains this is one reason the church has fallen on such hard times, the church emphasized the invisible church to such an extent, it has resulted in “an implicate disregard for the visible church.”¹⁴ The church has God as its Father, but rejects the Church as mother, and as a result many Christians are incomplete and stunted. The church must not reject those who have rejected the church but reach out to them and love.

In this post-Christian world, Olson notes, pastors and the church should operate much like the Early Church did—considering the needs of outsiders first. Current church leaders must emphasize the message and mission of Jesus in much the same way missionaries do in foreign lands. The new role of the pastor focuses on equipping members to understand and live out the message and mission of Jesus outside the church. Olson ardently concludes, “In the post-Christian world, only the healthy, the missional Church will prosper.”¹⁵ Churches must develop a mission mindset; they must go out into the world to meet people’s needs. This begins with focusing on the health of the church.

¹²Olson. 162.

¹³R. Kent Hughes. *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, rev. ed.; 10th anniversary ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 170.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Olson, 163.

Focusing on Church Health

Many authors have transitioned their focus from church growth to church health. They reason that it is God's will for a church to grow in the same manner as a child grows; if the child is healthy, he or she will naturally grow. Consequently, a healthy church naturally grows. Regarding church health, C. Peter Wagner writes of a church disease called *koinonitis* that, when fully developed, will hinder growth. *Koinonitis* surfaces when "Christians develop fellowship to such an exaggerated sense that all their attention and energies are absorbed by other Christians that they forget visitors."¹⁶ Without referring to it, church attendees who have this disease do not desire new people to come into the church because they might find it uncomfortable to ascertain the visitors' names and faces. Visitors upset this warm family atmosphere; it takes effort to assimilate new people into the church.

Wagner identifies another disease within the church called *social logical strangulation*, which occurs when the church facility no longer accommodates the people flow adequately, either due to the size of the sanctuary or the lack of parking.¹⁷ People feel uncomfortable parking their car in an overcrowded parking area. In a similar manner, when church attendance exceeds 75 to 80 percent of the sanctuary space, people become uncomfortable.¹⁸ This statistic holds true especially among Anglo congregations. Lack of parking space and an over-crowded sanctuary serve as indicators that the church needs more space.

¹⁶C. Peter Wagner, *Leading Your Church to Growth* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1984), 183-184.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 184.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

Arrested spiritual development, another growth-inhibiting disease within the church, surfaces when the church no longer grows spiritually because church leaders do not feed the people the Word of God.¹⁹ True church growth is ultimately God's work; therefore, churches must work on better discipleship methods. In this day, when Sunday school is becoming very rare, churches must develop key discipleship formats. Many churches use a small group ministry, adult Sunday school, or a large group setting such as the traditional Wednesday night service to feed the sheep. Though discipleship venues help believers grow in their walk with Christ, every pastor must also mature and grow spiritually so that he or she, in turn, can feed others.

The journey toward church health begins with assessing the church; two excellent tools can aid the church leader in this process. Natural Church Development (NCD) is one such group. NCD focuses on increasing the quality of the health of the church rather than on numerical growth goals. This emphasis on church health has shown to be a key to on-going growth of the local church, "Churches that have done 3 or more NCD surveys, have increased their average growth rate by 51% between the last and the 3rd survey."²⁰

Another tool for assessing the health of the church is through the tool of Appreciative Inquiry (AI), a process where the people of the organization are surveyed to discover what is working in that organization. AI is different than problem solving. Problem solving is identifying troubles, analyzing causes, to give possible solutions and to develop key action plans, but the purpose of an AI session is to discover the organization's best. It is "concerning 'the best' of the organization's narratives, practices

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Natural Church Development. "The Essence of NCD," <http://www.ncd-international.org/public/essence.html> (accessed January 4, 2010).

and imaginations.”²¹ The outcome is to “Innovate ‘what will be’ through discourse, commitment, and equipping, with the largest possible level of participation.”²²

AI operates off of certain assumptions; it assumes that in every organization, some things work well. Even the “most challenged and dispirited organization has narratives and practices that can resource a helpful future.”²³ The purpose of AI is to discover what has worked in the past and what is working and then to build on those successes. Also, “What we focus on becomes our reality.”²⁴ So if an organization completely focuses on its weaknesses, those shortcomings of the organization might increase instead of diminish. AI teaches that an organization does not dismiss the serious challenges of the church or the lessons of previous mistakes, but a church must center its attention on strengths.

Another AI assumption is that when a question is asked, it influences the group. A research tool will influence the way people think simply by making them focus on the question. Everything must be done to protect the past of the organization, without hindering future change.

A fourth assumption is that “People have more confidence in the journey to the future when they carry forward parts of the past.”²⁵ Confidence and trust must be developed when the questions asked connect to the organization’s best and most

²¹Mark Lau Branson, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2004), 138.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., 25

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

appreciated stories. A church should take what worked in the past and bring that into the future.

Still another important assumption of AI is that organizations are “heliotropic,” which is a botanical term about a plant’s orientation; it is the idea that plants lean toward the sun. “Similarly, organizations learn toward the source of energy-whether that energy is healthy or not.”²⁶

After the health of the church is assessed, leadership can work toward developing a proper plan for the church, with a strong mission mindset. A church must focus on what it does well and what it is called to be and whom it is called to reach.

Operating with a Mission Mindset

Due to the vast amount of literature regarding secular leadership, church leaders might encounter the temptation to develop an unbiblical model. Therefore, the pastor and church leaders must strive to develop a missional model of ministry. Jesus Christ by definition was sent by the Father on a mission (John 20:21), so the “community of God’s people exists, not for themselves, but for the sake of the work.”²⁷ Many churches have forgotten their purpose. “Many pastors would say their congregations are becoming little more than idiosyncratic relics shaped by quaint memories of a fading past.”²⁸

Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk in their book, *The Missional Leader*, provide an excellent challenge for a missional church. “A congregation must change its thinking and learn to see itself functioning like a cross-cultural missionary rather than to

²⁶ Ibid, 27.

²⁷ Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006), xv.

²⁸ Ibid., 19.

be a gathering place where people come to receive religious goods and services.”²⁹

Missional churches gather their life from God and become a powerful witness of God and a foretaste of what God is doing in all creation. They demonstrate Jesus as the ultimate hope for society.

A church can easily forget its reason for being. Shamefully, a church often seeks to maintain the organization to meet budgets and satisfy egos, instead of existing to consummate the mission of Jesus Christ. In the proper contexts and settings, the church can apply many secular models of leadership, but when the church denies its true calling, it misses an opportunity to shape leadership into a biblical sense. “Leadership is about cultivating an environment that innovates and releases the missional imagination present among a community of God’s people.”³⁰ As a congregation of God’s people, the local church should not be run as a business enterprise nor borrow secular ideas and strategies alone.

The North American entrepreneurial model used in many churches expects the pastor to set the goals and take charge in a manner analogous to leadership in the business world. This model implies that a successful CEO of a company could succeed in many churches, whether he or she had a relationship with Christ or not. According to Roxburgh and Romanuk, this approach “is deeply rooted in the North American myth of heroic, charismatic personality, who, like some form of spiritual superman or superwoman, guarantee success for the power of personality or strategic skills.”³¹ Not only does this put unfair pressure on a pastor, it does not follow the biblical model.

²⁹Ibid., 13.

³⁰Ibid., 5.

³¹Ibid., 27.

A better model for the pastor is that of a cultivator—someone who knows how to “work the soil of the congregation so as to invite and constitute the environment for the people of God to discern what God is doing in, with, and among them as a community.”³² Pastoral leadership is about cultivating an environment that emancipates the missional imagination of ordinary people. God uses common and ordinary people. The chasm between the professional clergy and the laity has hindered spiritual formation; even the Apostle Paul explained that God did not choose the powerful or the rich to build His kingdom: “God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised” (1 Cor. 1:27-28). Alleviation from the burden of having to be a super human person is a wonderful relief.

Effective pastors seek to stir up the gifts of the people in the congregation. Carl George and Robert E. Logan wrote on leadership in the local church, “When we examine growth potential in a congregation, we discover that when a pastor primarily does the ministry in the congregation, rather than leading others to do the ministry, growth potential remains small.”³³ It is more important to lead other into ministry than for the pastor to view him or herself as the only one in ministry.

A successful pastor of a missional church must understand the following perspectives of church leadership. First, the pastor must develop an awareness of what God is doing in the congregation. All too often, church growth literature asks the pastor what he or she wants in a church instead of determining what God is already doing in a

³²Ibid., 28.

³³Carl F. George and Robert E Logan, *Leading & Managing Your Church* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1987), 15.

church. Second, a successful pastor is aware of how a congregation imagines itself as being in the center of God's activities. Third, the successful pastor understands how hard times shapes the congregation and how God shapes His people through trials (James 1:1-2). Leaders who possess these crucial skills know how to listen to parishioners' life stories—including their stress, anxiety, and confusion in everyday life.

After modeling a seeker-sensitive approach to church growth, Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois now plans to gear its weekend services toward mature believers seeking to grow in their faith. Since 1975 the church avoided conventional church approaches and attempted to use its Sunday services to reach the unchurched through “polished music, multimedia, and sermons referencing popular culture and other familiar themes.”³⁴ Research concluded that nearly a quarter of those who considered themselves either close to Christ or Christ-centered were spiritually stalled or dissatisfied with the role of the church in their spiritual growth.³⁵

Bringing About Change

A church must experience a cultural transformation before it can attempt an organizational transformation. Cultural transformation results when people within the congregation as a whole adapt to the change occurring in the church. As change permeates the congregation, the change suggested by the few becomes the general viewpoint of the majority. This desired change comes about as believers listen to the Word of God, listen to one another, and, consequently, become aware of the change

³⁴Adelle M. Banks, “Willow Creek’s ‘Huge Shift,’” *Christianity Today* (June 2008): 13.

³⁵Ibid.

occurring in the community. The people will become empowered to effect change as they hear from God and see His heart to meet their needs.

Missional leaders recognize that change takes time, and so they take small steps to implement change. Major change brought too quickly can destroy an organization. Depending on the church's readiness for change, an effective leader implements changes in either baby steps or giant leaps. The leader gauges the people's comfort level and implements small changes, which over time, lead to large change. Through experimentation, dialogue, and interactive engagement, church leaders must align the congregation's strategy and structure with the shared values around a common goal or vision statement.

In *Becoming a Healthy Church: 10 Characteristics*, Stephen A. Macchia writes on "tensions" that the church must follow to bring about effective change: 1) Reflection - to take the time to ask some basic question about whom we are, and where we want the church to be in the future and how to get there; 2) Affirmation - acknowledging certain truths about who we are and the assets of the church; 3) Evaluation -taking a good look at church relationships, knowledge, skill levels and the best ways to enhance our ministry; and 4) Application -Bringing the necessary changes and growth was a result of self-analysis the church has completed.³⁶

Due to the continual shift of people, direction, and nature of ministry within the church, Roxburgh and Romanuk delineate a missional change model.³⁷ In this model, leaders must first investigate and listen. Unless a leader learns to listen to the needs and

³⁶Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church: 10 Characteristics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 219.

³⁷This model is referred to as MCM.

issues of the people, he or she might not adequately understand the issues at hand. Many leaders quickly plunge into a new strategy, plan, or program without taking time to ascertain the needs of the people. “Until people can put their feelings into words and be heard, they are held captive by unarticulated anxiety.”³⁸

Second, leaders gain clearer understanding by using dialogue to integrate thoughts and feelings. They often attempt various solutions before gaining a full understanding of the dilemma and waste valuable time and resources in the process. By gaining understanding of the people’s perspective, the pastor or leader can identify the areas where people long for change. When followers understand that the leader cares enough to listen, they will extend greater trust to the leader.

Third, the leaders must evaluate and apply the awareness and understanding to the situation. At this point, people contemplate whether specific activities, programs, and commitments are congruent with their awareness of the needs of the congregation. Leaders ask hard questions such as: (1) Is the church doing the right thing within this new context? (2) Does the church have the necessary skills? (3) What other groups and resources are needed to bring about the necessary change? This stage involves evaluation rather than action and deliberation. Evaluation frequently creates anxiety because people experience discomfort with change. At this point, the leader must help the congregants understand that change will be implemented incrementally. The leader must develop the vital skill of judging how quickly to make change and when to slow down. Otherwise, a congregation may split over too much modification, taken too quickly.

³⁸Roxburgh and Romanuk, 87-102.

Fourth, the church engages in experimentation. During this stage, the organization takes significant risks with some change. The goal at this stage is to introduce a process that invites people into changing the culture of the congregation, not just the programs themselves. This process of experimentation allows for mistakes and corrections and bestows follower buy-in to the change process. This differs from the all-powerful leader who decrees the change.

Fifth, the church experiences commitment from the majority of the church; the people sign on to new ways of being the church. At this stage, the congregation gains confidence and believes they can adapt and innovate. The church recognizes the need for change in order to effectively carry out the mission of the church.

Developing a Sense of Urgency

Generally-speaking, people long for status quo. Consequently, unless people experience a sense of urgency, change will not occur naturally. Without a heightened sense of urgency, organizations will never find enough time or resources to complete needed change. Alan Nelson and Gene Nelson, in *How to Change Your Church Without Killing It*, identify the following leadership formula: “To determine if a congregation is ready to move forward: discomfort with status quo + vision + doable steps = resistance to change.”³⁹

In *Leading Change*, John Kotter identifies some of the common errors organizations encounter as they make change. First, he identifies the error of permitting

³⁹Alan E. Nelson and Gene Appel, *How to Change Your Church Without Killing It* (Nashville, TN: Word, 2000), 189. In the case of Abundant Life, for instance, the sale of the previous building and the construction of the new worship facility created a huge sense of urgency for the church. Although Sunday services met at the local high school, the church did not have another place to meet during the week. In addition, the tremendous rental expense and on going mortgage helped motivate the church, the staff, and me, as the pastor.

too much complacency. People usually do not like change unless someone demonstrates that the change will enhance the group or individual. Second, Kotter notes the error of failing to create a sufficiently powerful guiding coalition of leaders.⁴⁰ Likewise, all churches need a strong team of leaders who will guide the church as a whole.

Change never comes easy; on the other hand, it regularly produces conflicts and problems. Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger in *Simple Church*, compare the church's normal reluctance to change to that of the 600,000 people who have heart bypasses in America.⁴¹ The bypass is only a temporary repair, they must change: diet, quit smoking and drinking, they must exercise and reduce stress, but "ninety percent of the heart patients do not change. They remain the same, living the status quo."⁴² Change is difficult. The majority of churches elect to maintain the status quo. Rainer and Geiger encourage their readers to pray for discernment and ask God to give wisdom and favor.

The Church faces a bleak future if it does not undergo the hard work toward proper change. According to Olson, by the year 2020 the Christian church will decline in numbers from its 2005 figure of 17.5 percent of Americans who attend church to only 14.7 percent, while the American population will simultaneously grow from what it was in 2005 (296 million) to 336 million in 2020.⁴³ He claims that 55,000 churches will close between the years 2005 while 60,000 new churches will open. Yet, to keep pace with population growth, there needs to be a net gain of 48,000 churches. According to these

⁴⁰John Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1996), 6.

⁴¹Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 2006), 229.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid., 175.

statistics, the American church will fall short of this mark by almost 43,500 churches in fifteen years. Just as startling, Evangelical attendance percentage will not support the population growth. “The weekend attendance percentage at evangelical churches will fall below 9 percent by 2010 and will be at 8.5 percent in 2020.”⁴⁴

Leaders must live by faith and grow in perseverance and resist the urge to give up easily. Olson describes how church leaders should work at building their church as a farmer works his trees and not give up: “The church needs to really learn how to dig around and fertilize the roots of the tree so that the whole tree begins to bear fruit again.”⁴⁵ As the Apostle Paul explained, God uses suffering to refine our character, so hard times for the church leader should be recognized as from the hand of God.

Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (Rom. 5:3-5).

Philip Lewis, in *Transformational Leadership*, discusses the need for Christian leaders who have developed incredible skills in godly persuasion and how this skill can lead to the needed change in the church. Transformational leaders present a strong personal vision to the church, while maintaining genuine respect for followers and their ideas. Leaders are patient and maintain a long-term perspective and stay committed to goals in the face of short-term obstacles and resistance. They exemplify gentleness and deal with vulnerabilities, disclosures, and feelings followers might express without harshness, hardness, or forcefulness. They understand that the vision is of God and that the battle is the Lord’s (2 Chron. 20:15). Transformational Leaders demonstrate an

⁴⁴Ibid., 176.

⁴⁵Olson, 168.

attitude of teachability; they operate with the assumption that no one has all the answers. Therefore, leaders evaluate different viewpoints, judgments, and experiences that followers may have. They accept others' opinions and withhold judgment till they exhaust all research on the subject. In order to make it safe for followers to risk, leaders express compassion but are not afraid to confront, acknowledging personal errors, and the need for followers to make "course corrections"⁴⁶ in the context of genuine care, concern, and warmth. Leaders demonstrate consistency in values through manifestation of their own character. Integrity marks the life of a transformational leader; their words and feelings match their thoughts and actions with "no desire other than for the good of others, and without malice or desire to deceive, take advantage, manipulate or control."⁴⁷

Religious congregations demonstrate tremendous resilience during difficult times. "A new study finds that only one percent of US religious congregations go out of existence each year," demonstrating the incredible staying power of the local church.⁴⁸ That survival does not necessarily mean that the church exhibits spiritual health. In other organizational domains, weaker organizations give way to stronger organizations. In the church realm, weak churches have a way of staying alive for a long time; instead of welcoming this news, church leadership must find ways of becoming healthy and vibrant. No church should express satisfaction with mere survival.

⁴⁶Phillip V. Lewis *Transformational Leadership: A New Model for Total Church Involvement* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 15.

⁴⁷Ibid., 15.

⁴⁸John Dart, "Church-Closing Rate Only One Percent," *The Christian Century* (2008): 14.

Nelson and Appel state that “people do what they perceive is in their best interest, thinking as rationally as circumstances allow them to think.”⁴⁹ People are not inherently anti-change; many will embrace change if they recognize the necessity of the change and how it will benefit the church or their personal life. The pastor’s task, then, must focus on keeping the need for change before the people and demonstrating how the change will benefit both them and the gospel. Once a congregation sees the need to change from a biblical perspective, they display a greater willingness to embrace the change.

Change is part of any organization; businesses change, society changes, and churches change. Change requires innovation, but what happens when people refuse to change? As the church moves from one stage of transition to another, people often feel uncomfortable. “Transition is the state of change, an inward and a psychological reorientation that people have to go through before the change can work.”⁵⁰ Transition takes longer than people imagine because people encounter three upsetting processes during change.

First, people must say goodbye. During this phase, people must let go of the way things used to be, especially the way they used to be as a person. “It isn’t just a personal preference you are asking them to give up. You are asking them to let go of the way of engaging or accomplishing tasks that made them successful in the past.”⁵¹

Second, the change process requires people to shift into neutral. After people abandon the old ways, they experience difficulty in making a fresh start because they

⁴⁹Alan E. Nelson and Gene Appel, *How to Change Your Church Without Killing It* (Nashville, TN: Word Pub, 2000), 73.

⁵⁰William Bridges and Susan Mitchell, “Leading Transition: A New Model for Change,” *Leader to Leader Institute* 16 (2000): 32.

⁵¹*Ibid.*

have entered what Bridges and Mitchell call the neutral zone. Coping with the overwhelming amount of uncertainty and confusion of this phase saps the person's energy. Business mergers and acquisitions which place careers and policy decisions on the line experience this phase in a big way, but the principle equally applies to the church. The neutral zone transition, however, is an important time of growth: "The neutral zone is uncomfortable, so people are driven to get out of it."⁵² It often takes people and organizations six months to two years to emerge successfully from the neutral zone. This phase requires that a pastor express patience and move slowly with the changes.

Third, the change process ultimately leads to forward momentum. People who fail to move forward fail because they refuse to release the old ways; others, frightened by the neutral zone, do not stay with the process long enough for it to produce the necessary change. Leaders must describe change and why it must happen and do so succinctly. Although the leaders must carefully plan the details of change, too much information too quickly can often muddle the waters. Effective leaders help people understand what must be abandoned and why. Proper communication, rather than simple transmission of information, serves as a key to helping people achieve momentum toward the anticipated change.

Just as leaders take time to come to terms with the necessary changes, "their followers will need at least as long to do so."⁵³ Instead of getting offended or hurt when followers buck change, leaders must understand why someone would not embrace change

⁵²Ibid, 32.

⁵³Bridges and Mitchell, 32.

and help them through it. The transitions, not necessarily the change, could be what is holding people back.⁵⁴

As a church embraces major changes, the leader should ensure that the church stays encouraged throughout the process. Churches with a history of problems, including church-splits, and the threat of closed doors desperately need the encouragement generated by short-term wins. Church leaders must point to small victories and reward people for being agents of change.

The Method: Strategic Planning

After a church is evaluated, a key growth strategy is to develop a strategic plan for the church with an emphasis on methods that will grow the church. Strategic planning can address issues of church health and church growth. Some of the topics covered in this key section are developing effective leadership teams, seeking the vision and the mission of the church, adapting the plan to the culture of the church, and developing a system to assimilate visitors into the church. Additional related topics such as conflict management, the role of small groups, and discussion about the church facility itself are addressed in the appendixes.

Developing Effective Leadership Teams

Leading a church requires the building of effective boards and leadership teams. The pastor should encourage the leadership to come up with their own ideas rather than merely going along with his or her dreams. This requires the development of thinking

⁵⁴Bridges and Mitchell speak of the “The Marathon Affect”—the higher a leader sits in an organization, the more quickly he or she tends to move through the change process because she or she can see the intended destination before others. (Ibid., 34.)

leaders who hear from God themselves. Kotter puts it this way: “Getting people to buy into proposals means more than getting their vote or okay to begin implementation.”⁵⁵

Growth serves as the key goal for the church. “The motive must be a desire to please God by bearing fruit in reaching others for Christ.”⁵⁶ Unfortunately, some pastors desire change for personal exaltation rather than for helping people in need. They desire to be noticed and feel good about themselves and their work. However, only the pastor who relies on the Holy Spirit’s direction and surround himself or herself with an excellent leadership team will effectively lead the church.

Kotter argues against the notion that only a few people have leadership ability. He identifies several types of power, which every leadership team must possess. Positional power indicates that leadership has the respect of the rest of the organization. Credibility plays a crucial role in the respect a leader receives from the church body. Leaders also need expertise power.⁵⁷ The church that longs for change will develop effective, honest, and solid Christian leaders.

Developing Strong Church Leaders

Leaders who transform an organization enjoy building on the gifts of followers, focus on developing the dormant strengths in others, and love watching them come to life. These leaders have a way of getting people to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of others. Transformational leaders differ from what Philip Lewis calls transactional leaders, in a similar fashion to the typical manager-leader paradigm—the

⁵⁵Kotter, 61.

⁵⁶Ibid., 18.

⁵⁷Formerly, Abundant Life looked for any willing volunteer to fill ministry positions; now the church identifies ministry leaders who exhibit disciplined work habits, experience, and a genuine willingness and hunger to learn and succeed.

leader comes up with the plans and dreams of the organization while the manager runs the day-to-day operations. Managers verify that everything runs smoothly in the organization, but leaders create better and more efficient ways of working. They solve daily problems by fixing the difficulties caused by the day's changing events, while leaders create a better future and they focus on the process whereas leaders focus on the product which, within the church, is the people of God and make sure that every little detail is taken care of; leaders set the purposes and directions for the organization, while verifying that people put in an honest day's work for their pay, while leaders inspire people to do more than expected and have a unique way of bringing the best out of people. They organize and plan to meet stated objectives, but leaders create a vision of God's plan for the future.

Transformational leaders focus on strategies which keep the church centered on its primary reason for being. The church's greatest temptation, according to Lewis, is settling for mere survival. The church should grow and thrive as it extends increased services to attendees and the local community. A crucial question the church should ask itself is: "How different would the community be if this church no longer existed?" These type of leaders love to ask questions which stretch the church and help them go places they have ever been. They wage war against apathy.

Strong leaders provide congruence or agreement between differing parts of the church. Strategies of the church in one ministry must complement other departments and, in turn, support the primary strategy of the church and they think way ahead and prepared for the future. They make wise decisions, which improve the church for the current time as well as the years ahead.

Lewis identifies several social traits that every successful transformational leader should develop. First, a transformational leader must recognize and appreciate the work and the dignity of each person, regardless of that person's gifts or talents. Leaders that transform an organization realize that people need to be needed and believe that people have unlimited potential and value. Frustrated pastors often look for the latest tools and trends to grow the church yet miss the most valuable resource in the church—the people. Trusting relationships characterize the transformational leaders' life. He or she understands that leadership begins with trust and worthiness increases with time.

Also, transformational leaders provide proper recognition to others because people deserve credit and recognition for what they have accomplished. Lewis contends that insecure leaders are often afraid to give credit for fear that the recipient might fall into false pride, but recognition given in a proper manner, glorifies the Lord and builds up the recipient and the overall congregation. Lewis notes that “Congregations that have recognized the contributions of their members have flourished.”⁵⁸

Likewise, a transformational leader must possess certain moral traits. The church needs leaders who have tremendous personal integrity: “Unless Christians show they are redeemed, how will others believe in the Redeemer?”⁵⁹ Leaders are driven and motivated to accomplish more for the Lord and they enjoy responsibility and strive for intrinsic rewards rather than extrinsic rewards. Once a transformational leader achieves a major goal, they aspire to a new one.⁶⁰

⁵⁸Lewis, 47.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰This explains why after a major building program, many church leaders live the organization. The building program took so much energy and resources, sometimes a leader cannot imagine doing anything else.

Leaders must also develop certain mental traits. “Transformational leaders typically have greater analytical ability and can see broad problems.”⁶¹ Again, the mature leader will recognize that he or she does not have all the answers and must depend on the people that surround the leader. As the church grows numerically, the pastor’s spends more time with key leaders. These key leaders in turn take charge of daily church activities.

Transformational leaders have faith in God, but they also believe in themselves. This is why when the transformational leader becomes unhappy, unproductive, and dissatisfied, they know how to gather their spiritual resources and gather people around them to work out the problems and come up with happy solutions. They frequently display emotional stability, maturity, and are not easily defeated by failure nor are they overjoyed by victory. They exhibit tact, know how to succeed with people, and are not afraid of change because of some underlying insecurity. They also accept responsibility and do not blame others when things go wrong. As a result, transformational leaders know how to avoid church splits because they work well with their team and can handle criticism; plus, they are also not overly critical of others and the methods they use. Thom Rainer, in his book, *Breakout Churches*, compares legacy leaders to Level Five Leaders in Jim Collins’ famous book, *Good to Great*.⁶² Legacy leaders or level five leaders seek to acquaint others with the work of the ministry while deflecting the recognition for themselves⁶³ and are not only concerned with the church during their

⁶¹Lewis, 48.

⁶²James C. Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap—and Others Don’t* (New York: Harper Business, 2001).

⁶³Thom S. Rainer, *Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 28.

lifetime, but they make decisions that will benefit the church years after they leave. They quickly praise other people but are equally quick to accept responsibility for anything that may go wrong.

Rainer lists eight important characteristics of these legacy leaders. First, these leader have a fierce biblical faithfulness and adhere to a high view of Scripture. Second, they have settled the tenure issue; they desire long-term ministry in one church. Rainer notes that the average tenure of a breakout church leader exceeds twenty-one years.⁶⁴ “The church in America is mired in unhealthy structures that cannot be reversed in a short period.”⁶⁵ This requires the breakout leader to be an ever-growing and stretching leader.

Third, the legacy leader displays confident humility. He or she recognizes that changes within the church must come slowly, persistently, and incrementally. No one person can accept the responsibility for all ministries within the church. The weight of leadership does not intimidate the legacy leaders who have learned to transfer their cares and concerns to God. “They see no obstacle as being so great that the church, in God’s power cannot overcome.”⁶⁶ They willingly roll up their sleeves and work hard.

Fourth, legacy leaders express unconditional love for all people despite having experienced tremendous pain and sorrow as they lead their churches. Even when many church members had left an organization which resulted in conflict, these leaders still expressed “an intense love for the members of their congregations,” which aided their

⁶⁴Ibid., 57.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Ibid., 61.

God-given calling.⁶⁷ “One of the key reasons the leaders of the “comparison churches” failed to move their churches to greatness was their unwillingness or inability to pay the costs necessary to do so.”⁶⁸ Often, the cost of becoming a breakout church is found in the problems and conflicts that result from other believers.

Fifth, legacy leaders focus outward in their vision, passionately communicate the vision, and know the best ways to implement the vision. Their zeal for the vision is contagious. Sixth, since these leaders have a long-term perspective, they lead toward progress “one incremental step at a time.”⁶⁹ Seventh, they have a strong desire for a lasting legacy yet not for their own good but for the church. They desire to see the church prosper and make a difference, even beyond their own years of leadership. This type of strong leadership has a unique way of looking years, even decades, down the road and ascertaining how current change will affect the church. Eighth, legacy leaders create a culture of excellence. They do not begin programs or projects unless they know the church will work the programs with high quality.

Choosing the Right Person for the Right Position

One of the most important jobs of the senior pastor is to verify that the right people are in the right position at the right time. The people of the congregation are the greatest resource for bringing change. Many churches use any willing volunteer to fill a needed position; however, new ministries should not be started until the right person comes forward.

⁶⁷Ibid., 62.

⁶⁸Rainer uses the term “comparison churches” as the opposite for “breakout churches” that succeed; Rainer, 192.

⁶⁹Ibid., 63.

Olson notes that the church must have a relentless commitment to experimentation and search for fruitful pathways of evangelism. All too often, a church fears trying new ways because it feels so battered down. If secular business models allow for mistakes and failures as long as they are used as learning tools, so must the church. The message of the gospel helps break down the bonds that hold people of all ages back; the gospel message restores hope through prayer, preaching, and practical helps. “All people need to be set free from whatever holds them in bondage, whatever distorts the image of God in them.”⁷⁰

The message of the gospel helps people live in a new, resurrected life in Christ. “Spiritual formation is the resurrected life of Jesus at work within a Christian, which transforms his or her life.”⁷¹ The church, through its services, small groups, and teaching regarding spiritual disciplines such as prayer and fasting, facilitates this transformative work of God in the life of the believer.

The church should act as the Lord’s hands and feet. Churches should be incarnational, becoming the love of Christ by serving people in the community and serving others who are broken and who need love, support, and accountability for one another. Christian organizations and churches should pave the way to reform. In years gone by, “Christian organizations founded most hospitals, orphanages, food eateries, and homes for the elderly, homeless, and abused.”⁷² Due to the inward focus of the majority of churches, this commitment to the community has diminished. “The power of Christian community is realized when unconditional love and bold truth become the two pillars of

⁷⁰Olson, 213.

⁷¹Ibid, 214.

⁷²Ibid., 214.

community life, creating an irresistible authenticity.”⁷³ As Olson aptly states, the Early Church succeeded due to their love for each other.

In *Unleashing the Church*, Frank R. Tillapaugh writes that in many churches there are too few positions available to the average person. He says that in one church of 7,000 people, only 365 positions were available for lay people.⁷⁴ If church leaders can get lay people involved in ministry, it will solve two problems. First, it will dramatically reduce the internal people-problems of the average church; when people are involved they tend to gel together. The second more obvious problem solved when everyone has a place in ministry is the elimination of believers’ disobedience to the Great Commission. “If a church is not operating at maximum in terms of the Great Commission, it is a disobedient church.”⁷⁵

Seeking the Vision and Mission of the Church

Often, the institutionalized congregation does not stay true to its original mission but rather abandons its mission to serve itself. The Church desperately needs adequately prepared leaders who will transform congregations and be willing to lead. “Leadership is the most crucial skill in pastoral ministry. A pastor and leader must be trained to teach, develop a strategy, cast vision, engineer change, manage people—getting work done through others and managing conflict.”⁷⁶ John Dart, in his research, discovered that congregations that state clearly their missions statement and purpose and adopt a specific plan for approving new members have a better chance of growth.

⁷³Ibid., 217.

⁷⁴Frank R. Tillapaugh, *Unleashing the Church: Getting People Out of the Fortress and Into Ministry* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1985), 124.

⁷⁵Ibid., 127.

⁷⁶Hull, 87.

The mission of an organization states the main purpose for that particular organization. The temptation in any church is to maintain the status quo, to keep it going. A church likewise must clearly state the purpose for the church, which must line up with the clear biblical call for the church. Paul D. Borden writing about denominational said leaders, “When the region leaders adopted a mission that places the focus on the region’s efforts upon the local congregation as God’s basic unit of mission, we believed the mission was right and worth pursuing.”⁷⁷ After the mission of the church is understood, church leaders must discern a vision of the future for the church.

The mission statement expresses the purpose of the church and clearly identifies its focus. Values help the church clarify its mission and its highest reason for being. Values define the specific activities of the church and drive both the budget and the ministry plan. Continual course adjustments help the church remain true to its goals, mission, and values. For instance, because many people in America do not have a relationship with God, evangelism should be one of the highest values of the church. However, evangelism, within many churches, is the least implemented ministry within the church. In fact, most Christians do not have friendships with non-Christians. In *Becoming a Contagious Christian*, Bill Hybels and Mark Middleburg state that “a mere 14% of pastors claim that their churches are heavily involved in evangelism. Only one out of three churches ever trains its people in evangelism.”⁷⁸

⁷⁷Paul D. Borden, *Hit the Bullseye: How Denominations Can Aim Congregations At the Mission Field* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 66.

⁷⁸Bill Hybels and Mark Mittelberg, *Becoming a Contagious Christian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 20.

After understanding how to change the church and while doing the on-going work of building leaders, each leader must seek to discover and communicate the vision of the church. The vitality of the church depends on having a clearly defined and compelling vision. When a church lacks vision, the people have no clearly defined or achievable goals.⁷⁹ Vision clarifies and concentrates the labors of the church by keeping it focused on doing only the things it ought to do. D. L. Moody said, “Give me a man who says this one thing I do and not these 50 things that I dabble in.”⁸⁰

An effective vision portrays a clear vision of what the future will look like. It demonstrates why the changes are desirable and appealing to the long-term interest of the church. Leaders help establish a realistic vision, yet help stretch the boundaries by establishing far-reaching goals that reflect the unique purposes of the church. These specific goals help people know where to concentrate their efforts and finances. The vision and goals of the church must remain flexible enough to allow the moving of the Holy Spirit and so easily communicated that every member in the church could memorize it. Kotter says, “If you cannot describe your vision to someone in five minutes you have more work to do in this phase of the transformation process.”⁸¹

“This vision needs to be big enough to stir the blood, specific enough to be accomplished, and short enough to be put on a bumper sticker.”⁸² Vision comes from the

⁷⁹After the sale of its property, Abundant Life was forced to identify its core values. Through this process, the church recognized that it had been focusing on many busy-type ministries which caused undue stress on the families of the church. The lack of a space to facilitate all these ministries caused the church to find creative ways of carrying out ministry and helped the church develop its small group ministry.

⁸⁰Nelson and Appel, 144.

⁸¹Kotter, 78.

⁸²Ibid.

heart, results in passion, and moves people to do great things for God. As Bill Hybels notes about the ministry at Willow Creek, “We decided we wanted our goals to be big enough to require the supernatural activity of God.”⁸³ The vision, whether it incorporates commencing on a multi-million dollar building project or the establishment of a new evangelistic outreach ministry, must rely on the supernatural intervention of God. Vision requires the people of God to come together as the body of Christ to accomplish great things for God. “Vision has two interdependent components: faith and tenacity.”⁸⁴

Hybels writes about the supernatural ingredient of Christian leaders who rely on their relationship with God: “His promise reminds us that if we stay in close connection with him, he would infuse our leadership with power, creativity, courage, and whatever it takes for us to bear fruit for the glory of God.”⁸⁵

Leadership must develop a set of goals or time-based measurements to implement the strategies.⁸⁶ From that point, church leaders must focus on ministry programs as steps. “When you think steps, you start by asking, ‘Where do we want people to be?’”⁸⁷

Many congregations do not have vision, “yet few transforming organizational accomplishments or revolutions have taken place in history without a vision.”⁸⁸ The first responsibility of a leader is to provide a clear vision for the organization. An ambiguous

⁸³Bill Hybels, *Courageous Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 57.

⁸⁴Robert E. Logan, *Beyond Church Growth* (Old Tappan, NJ: F. H. Revell, 1989), 31.

⁸⁵Hybels, *Courageous Leadership*, 216.

⁸⁶The goal of Abundant Life is to create a place where the unsaved can find Christ and where Christians train for Christian ministry. To accomplish this goal, church leadership must develop solutions and programs to meet the needs of the church.

⁸⁷Andy Stanley, Reggie Joiner, and Lane Jones, *Seven Practices of Effective Ministry* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2004), 89.

⁸⁸Nelson and Appel, 133.

vision leaves church members unsure of what to work on. Consequently, the vision must be realistic in both goal-setting and planning because an outrageous or improbable vision will only cause discouragement or lack support. Some people are great at “selling the sizzle but never go further;” the vision must be compelling, or the people lose interest.⁸⁹

Vision comes from the heart, touches both the head and the heart, and provides a picture of a strong desire. “Leaders,” according to Nelson and Appel, “are social artists who paint mental landscapes reflecting a potential outcome. The best communicators are storytellers, mental image-makers.”⁹⁰ A vision instills hope. As Scripture states, “Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain for what we do not see” (Heb. 11:1). Vision provides a reason for unity; a well-communicated vision unifies people around a common cause and results in great synergy.

In *The Power of Vision*, George Barna defines vision as “Foresight with insight based on hindsight. ... Vision for ministry is a clear mental image of a preferred future imparted by God to his chosen servants and is based upon an accurate understanding of God, self and circumstances.”⁹¹

Vision is a picture held in the leaders’ eye of the way things could or should be in the days ahead. Vision entails change. It never focuses on maintaining the status quo but rather stretches the thinking about one’s existing state and moves the focuses to the future.

The vision of the church keeps the congregation unified. As everyone in the church understands the basics of the vision and goals of the church, people experience a

⁸⁹Ibid., 134.

⁹⁰Ibid., 137.

⁹¹George Barna, *The Power of Vision*, rev. ed. (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2003), 24.

sense of energy toward the stated goals. Just as the football coach guides the team yet the team often responds to the team captain, so the pastor must develop key leaders within the church who will motivate and direct the rest of the church. Collins emphasizes the importance of not building an organization around the personality of a charismatic leader when he says, “Larger than life, celebrity leaders who ride in from the outside are negatively correlated with going from good to great.”⁹²

As a church establishes its vision and goals, the leadership team must be mindful of the work done by previous generations. At some churches, people sacrifice for decades so the church can exist.⁹³ They developed today’s leaders, teachers, and pastors, and sent missionaries to the mission field. To belittle those older leaders would be offensive to them and their Lord. Since people commonly take up the offenses of others, offending these older leaders could curtail changes in the church culture. To avoid this pitfall, leaders can focus on expressing genuine appreciation for those who led the church in previous years.

Churches interested in growth must eliminate the idea of the superstar leader in the pulpit. Kotter notes that churches often look for “the elusive single individual who can jump tall buildings in a single bound.”⁹⁴ In order to avoid the superstar mentality, church leaders should teach on the priesthood of believers and equip believers to fulfill God’s calling on their lives. Pastors and church leaders should genuinely empower believers to do the work of the ministry as Paul encouraged: “It was he who gave some to

⁹²Collins, 40.

⁹³Though as of this writing, the senior population of Abundant Life has dwindled due to death or relocation.

⁹⁴Kotter, 164-165.

be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Eph. 4:11-12).

Once the leadership understands the call of God, they should implement a strategy for the church because 85 percent of America's Protestant churches are either stagnant or dying.⁹⁵ Analysis of the environment will assist Christian leaders in the development of a local strategy for growth. First, the leadership team should analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the church. A weakness is any limitation that would keep the church from achieving its goals and objectives. For example, poorly trained teachers or inadequate facilities create weaknesses. The church might consider participation in an objective third party evaluation of the pastor in order to ascertain his or her particular areas of strength and weakness.

Leaders are not afraid to attempt great things for God. In a quest to accomplish great things for God, the leader must identify areas in which the church can be most effective and seize the opportunity. Any situation that permits the church to enhance its position can serve as an opportunity.⁹⁶

Andy Rowell wrote that "Without clear goals, we will often end the day having accomplished nothing important."⁹⁷ Consequently, the leadership team must sets goals for the church which provide direction, create inspiration, and focus energy and resources.

⁹⁵Lewis, 107.

⁹⁶Ibid, 111.

⁹⁷Andy Rowell. "Why Pastors Should be Both Goal-Setting Fanatics and Cynics," *Church Leadership Conversations* Blog 2009.

Goal-setting also focuses the ministry and causes the church to focus on what it can accomplish. Rick Warren provides an excellent illustration:

Imagine what would happen to a commercial radio station if it tried to appeal to everyone's taste in music? A station that alternated its format between classical, heavy metal, country, rap, reggae, and southern gospel would end up alienating everyone. No one would listen to that station!⁹⁸

Clear goals, on the other hand, make extraordinary things possible.

The survival of the church depends on two crucial decisions: (1) vision—what a congregation wants to be and (2) strategy—how it plans to get there. “Strategic leadership is the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of actions that enable an organization to achieve its success.”⁹⁹ Church leadership shares with the business world the same strategic needs—the need for focused, concrete, and congruent responses to change.

Adapting the Culture of the Church

One serious challenge with change is making it permanent; this only occurs when there is a modification of the culture of the church. Once the culture of the church adapts, the needed change becomes inbuilt; the culture then becomes hard to vary. Culture adapts to the norms, behaviors, and values of a group or organization. During the change process, the church or organization faces a critical point when it takes on the new change as its own. The church becomes imbedded in the change; as a result, the entire culture of the people changes. People, who come into the church after the change is incorporated, automatically pick up the new culture. Edgar H. Schein wrote, “The targets of change

⁹⁸Richard Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message & Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 157.

⁹⁹Lewis, 34.

must believe that the organization will be better off if they learn the way of thinking and working.”¹⁰⁰ This aids the congregation in embracing the new ideas as their own.

Often, remaining at the status quo captivates people more than embracing the change required to move off the plateau and move to the next level of effectiveness. In order to move through the phases of change, the church leadership must make a commitment to move forward, knowing full well that a price will be paid for the change. Church growth experts have identified the following four types of churches in growth.

The patriarchal/matriarchal church functions like a family with applicable parental figures. It generally has approximately fifty members, as this is the outer limit of how many people one person can know intimately.¹⁰¹ The patriarchal/matriarchal congregation usually views the pastor as a chaplain because another influential person in the church maintains the actual leadership of the church. At this church level, the lay leader’s primary role is to ensure that the pastor does not take the congregation into a new direction of ministry without the congregation’s permission and the church pattern offers the advantage of intimacy and support with a family-friendly appeal. On the down side, this approach limits growth because church members view new comers as intruders. Also, the philosophy by which this style of church operates keeps the pastor from taking the church in the direction he or she feels God would have the church go.

The pastoral church ranges from fifty to 150 active members.¹⁰² The pastoral staff serves as the center in leadership. Effective leadership in this congregational style

¹⁰⁰Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 3rd ed., Jossey-Bass Business & Management Series (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 332.

¹⁰¹Roy M. Oswald, *Making Your Church More Inviting: A Step-By-Step Guide for in-Church Training* Alban Institute, (Herndon, VA, 1992), 6.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, 8.

depends on good communication with the congregation and the ability of the pastor to delegate authority, assign responsibility, and recognize the accomplishments of others. Normally, the pastoral church hires a seminary or Bible school-trained minister. The parishioners can contact the pastor for personal needs and crises. People generally feel as though they know practically everyone in the church. However, “when congregations begin to have 132-150 people coming every Sunday morning, they begin to get nervous because suddenly the church loses some of its intimate fellowship which they so prized.”¹⁰³ Many people in the pastoral church have difficulty making the change to the next level—the program church.

The program church has an attendance that ranges from 150-350 active members.¹⁰⁴ Pastoral leaders continue to be the center of the leadership model, but with revised roles. As the church grows, it transitions to a programmatic approach for providing spiritual growth. Lay leaders provide direction for many of the new programs while the pastor works with the leaders to ensure the highest quality program. The pastor transitions from being accessible to the congregants to having less direct ministry, which can be traumatic for the congregation and pastor alike. Church members who enjoyed the direct pastoral care long for more contact with their pastor, while the pastor feels distant and removed from direct ministry with the people. Therefore, not all churches or pastors should plan to move their church to this level. Unfortunately, modern society claims that large numbers indicate greater success, which is not always the case when it comes to the church.

¹⁰³Ibid.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 10.

The corporate church actively involves 350 or more members¹⁰⁵ and provides a high quality Sunday morning worship experience. Often, these churches have the best musical instruments and choirs in town and work hard to create a meaningful worship service. People who attend a corporate church sacrifice a personal connection with the senior pastor in favor of a corporate style with a variety of quality programs. Frequently, the community views the pastor as a legendary person.

Developing a System to Assimilate Visitors into the Church

Another key method for growing the church in numbers is learning how to better assimilate first time guests into the church body. If a church could only retain a greater portion of their visitors, the church would grow naturally. Nelson Searcy and Jennifer Dykes Henson's powerful book, *Fusion*, instructs churches on how to better assimilate guests: they defines assimilation as "simply well-planned or local hospitality through service."¹⁰⁶ Assimilation focuses on turning a first-time guest into a second-time guest and then turning a second-time guest into a regular attendee. Most churches have the golden growth opportunity each Sunday by the number of guests who attend the weekend services.

Searcy and Henson comment on the importance of the church rediscovering the role of biblical hospitality in our culture; they note that, unfortunately, "the business world understands more about true expressions of hospitality than the church does."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 11.

¹⁰⁶Nelson Searcy and Jennifer Dykes Henson, *Turning First-Time Guests into Fully Engaged Members of Your Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2007), 43.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 41.

Searcy believes that the church's ability to welcome new visitors could be compared to the Ritz Carlton Hotel's motto: "We are ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen."¹⁰⁸ Searcy claims that even the bell hops at these hotels learn the names of the guests. Should the church do anything less?

The more a church prepares to receive a guest, the more a church will receive new guests. Visitors only give the church seven minutes to make a positive first time impression.¹⁰⁹ Searcy helps the reader understand a visit from the viewpoint of the visitor. Initially, visitors experience anxiety just coming through the doors of the church. They worry about how people will receive them. They wonder if they are dressed properly or whether they will understand the worship service. Searcy and Henson encourage churches to become proactive in removing the barriers for first time visitors by creating an environment "that makes your first time guests feel welcome and respected."¹¹⁰ Church leaders must do their best to insure that guests feel comfortable. The church should assist the visitor in letting down his or her guard and feeling welcomed and accepted.

Church leaders should encourage excellence and graciousness toward the visitor, mixed with a generous dose of hospitality. Visitors often bring their own negative perceptions, experiences, or skepticism with them when they attend church for the first time. Searcy and Henson highlight the importance of proper signage as a simple yet effective means for making the visitor feel welcome. For instance, a visitor should never

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 53.

¹¹⁰Ibid.

need to ask where the restrooms or nurseries are located. In addition to proper signs, greeters and ushers play a crucial role in the assimilation for first time guests.

Consequently, greeters and ushers must genuinely love people because “a smile that doesn’t engage the eyes is automatically interpreted as false.”¹¹¹

Use of the Connection Card, an informational card that helps the church obtain vital contact information, serves as the key to the whole assimilation process.¹¹² When visitors submit the Connection Card, they receive a free book about Christ. However, the Connection Card also provides the church with other vital contact information such as the visitor’s phone number, email, and mailing address, which allows immediate follow-up on each visitor. Searcy and Henson believe the church should follow up on visitors on Monday afternoon via email at specifically 2-3 p.m., a downtime for email in most offices. Churches must not be afraid of investing financially into the process of assimilation. In fact, Searcy and Henson state that “growing churches spend \$400-\$500 on evangelism for each person who walks through the door as a first-time guest.”¹¹³

Nelson asserts that eighty percent of the battle is won in gaining a new member for the church when a visitor returns to the church for a second look. However, if the person is not properly assimilated, he or she may fall away. A key component of retention is the development of friendships within the church and gaining a sense of responsibility for their new church. According to Searcy and Henson, new friendships and a sense of ownership must take place quickly because people long to be involved rather than

¹¹¹Ibid., 57.

¹¹²Abundant Life does not fill out a card on each person every week, but diligently encourages visitors to turn in a Connection Card.

¹¹³Searcy and Henson, 97.

observing from the sidelines. Searcy and Henson, quoting Lyle Schaller, state, “The more friends a person has in a congregation, the less likely that person is to become inactive or leave the church.”¹¹⁴

To increase church warmth in relationships, Searcy and Henson encourage people to get involved in sticky situations: small groups, fun events, and service teams. Although small groups serve as the number one way to close the back door, other forms of relationship building can also be incorporated. These could include playgroups, special events simply designed to build friendships in the church, sporting events, outings, and parenting events, just to name a few ideas.

The most important aspect of keeping a new visitor, however, is in transferring responsibility to the person. “As long as they are not taking on any responsibility, your attendees will approach the church with a consumerist mentality.”¹¹⁵ Searcy and Henson assert that the newcomer encounters a key transition when he or she stops calling it “their” church but begins referring to the church as “our” church. “If individuals find themselves with a responsibility which contributes to the well-being of the church, it is likely they will stay.”¹¹⁶ As a church grows, it must consciously look for tasks new people can accomplish, even before they join the church or are a committed believer.

Searcy and Henson claim that churches often give up too easily on visitors. They encourage the pastor to send a handwritten letter to each visitor who has not returned after one month. Some visitors had intentions of returning, but something came up that next Sunday and the following Sunday. With each week that passes, they feel more

¹¹⁴Ibid., 121.

¹¹⁵Ibid., 138.

¹¹⁶Wagner, 206.

hesitant to return, and a letter of kindness and concern can sometimes encourage the visitor to return.

Conclusion

The church needs a major transformation. For the churches of New England to affect their culture, they need to focus on the true mission of the church as expressed in the Great Commission. Church leaders must develop a sense of urgency to bring the church to greater heights of effectiveness; leaders must have the discernment to know when to change the church and when to be careful not to harm it by changing too quickly.

Each church leader must build effective teams of committed people to do the ministry of the church, including ensuring that the right person lands into the right ministry position. The church must help people discern their talents and gifts. This often comes with conflict, and so the leadership team must be careful when dealing with differences. To be successful, the church leader must receive from God the vision of the church and then to adapt it to the culture, styles and history of the church.

Churches which successfully discern their mission and vision—and leaders who can effectively communicate that mission and vision to their team of leaders—will be able to effectively strategize for the future, resulting in greater church health and growth for that congregation. The Church in New England needs to reach the region of the country for Jesus. Though the work sometimes seems daunting, through the power of the Holy Spirit, it can be done.

CHAPTER 4

DESCRIPTION OF FIELD PROJECT

Introduction

This project explored the best methods to facilitate numeric growth at Abundant Life in Colchester, Connecticut. Though the search for better methods will not end with this project, this concentrated time of study and research benefited the church growth process. According to John Maxwell, “Everything rises and falls on leadership.”¹ Therefore, a foundational aspect of this project focused on improving my leadership skills as pastor, to help involve the congregation in contemplation, research, and dreaming. In addition, church growth is closely related to church health. Consequently, this project also focused on improving the leadership abilities of the church’s leadership team.

In order to involve the church in the process, I facilitated a two-week Appreciative Inquiry (AI) session. The purpose of the AI was to discover the current strengths of the church so as to build on those positive aspects. All too often an organization tries to shore up its weakest areas first; since each church displays its own unique challenges and strengths, Abundant Life decided to first discover its areas of effectiveness.

Abundant Life holds Sunday school after the morning worship service, and many adults and teenagers participate in a variety of Sunday school classes. The Sunday school

¹John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People Will Follow You* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 225.

venue provided the perfect platform from which to host the AI, performed on September 5 and 12, 2008 after the Sunday morning worship service. To facilitate discussion, the chairs in the sanctuary were rearranged into circles to accommodate about six people.

The second research methodology focused on discovering what other churches in New England are doing to develop their churches. I interviewed several Southern New England pastors who lead growing churches with a similar size and location as Abundant Life. If the axiom that growing a church in New England is more difficult than in other parts of the country, I felt that Abundant Life could benefit from local ideas.

The third phase of research included the evaluation of the health of Abundant Life through the Natural Church Development (NCD) survey.² Because the church had participated in an NCD survey in 2007, the results of the 2009 evaluation were compared with the previous results. The Natural Church Development survey will only score a total of thirty people, regardless of the size of the church. Consequently, the survey was limited to people who had graduated from high school. Unlike the AI session, which sought to discover the church's strengths, the NCD helped the church ascertain its minimal factor. It identified the eight most prominently missing quality characteristics within the church. The results of the NCD survey were professionally scored and compared to tens of thousands of churches across the world.

In conjunction with the adults and teenagers who attended the evaluation session, I discussed the results of the NCD survey with the church body to ascertain the health of the church and to identify the basic preferences of the congregation. A questionnaire with twenty-five questions was implemented as a means of identifying various issues such as

²See Page 112-115 for the full results.

how much time people spent in devotions, how happy they were in marriage, what type of worship style they preferred, and their preference regarding the start time and length of the Sunday morning worship service.

In summary, the goals of this project were (1) to explore the best church growth methods for Abundant Life, (2) to research and discover how to improve the pastor's leadership ability and style through both academic research and through field study—interviewing pastors of growing churches in New England, (3) to discover the strengths of Abundant Life and to build on them, and (4) to discover the weaknesses of Abundant Life and provide leadership to the church and the church board regarding ways to shore up these challenged areas.

This chapter describes the process taken to complete this project. The four main sections of chapter 4 include: (1) the preparation for the project, (2) the execution of the project, (3) the results of the project, and (4) the project's contribution to ministry.

Preparation for the Project

As the pastor of the church in Colchester, Connecticut, I recognized the need for personal leadership growth, which would inevitably impact the growth of the church. Although ministry in New England presents its own unique challenges, the God-given vision for Abundant Life compelled me to do further research into what other churches were doing so as to glean vital information and ideas for use at Abundant Life.

Phase 1—Appreciative Inquiry

During Phase 1, I focused on researching the best way to create a successful Appreciative Inquiry (AI) session. After reading information by Dr. Roger Heuser,³

³Dr. Roger Heuser of Vanguard University is an expert in the field of Appreciative Inquiry.

speaking to him personally, and reading through his personal notes, I developed a set of questions based on a series of topics the church board had identified to understand the strengths of the church.

In order to maximize attendance, I selected two consecutive Sundays at the beginning of the school year to present the Appreciative Inquiry. Because the church holds Sunday school after the morning worship, it was natural for people to stay for the meeting. Attendance at the AI meetings included a strong representation of the church, so the results provided an accurate reflection of the church at large. Only adults could participate in the Appreciative Inquiry meetings.

The church board reviewed the results of the AI and chose a team who would develop “Provocative Propositions.” These symbolic statements express what the church does best and how everyone can participate in creating more of the best. Derived from events that actually took place in the church, these provocative propositions stretch and challenge the congregation through bold, affirmative, and present tense values—creating unity and eliminating the unnecessary.

The atmosphere for the AI sessions was fun and upbeat. I divided the adults into small groups of six to share their answers to the AI questions and played soft music during the time of group discussion. The session was a relaxed time where people enjoyed laughter and warm times of remembering past events in the church. Because the focus of this session was to identify the church’s strengths, creating the right atmosphere for this event was crucial so as to deter people from offering complaints or criticisms about the church.

The session began with a presentation regarding some key assumptions about any organization: (1) in every society, organization, or group something works; (2) what one focuses on becomes a reality; (3) the act of asking questions of an organization or group influences the group in some way; (4) some people find the confidence and the comfort to journey into the future when they carry forward parts of the past; (5) if one carries part of the past forward, those things should be what is best about the past; (6) it is important to value differences; and (7) the language one uses creates one's reality.⁴

I explained the difference between AI and problem solving. Appreciative Inquiry means building more of what works while problem solving focuses on doing less of something not done well. Appreciative Inquiry values the best of what is and envisions people about what might be.⁵ The discussion was supposed to focus on what should be.

Phase 2—Pastoral Interviews

Phase 2 of this project involved field research among growing New England churches. I conducted an initial interview with Rev. Bill Button, the Executive Director of Church Development at the Southern New England District (SNED), and a former pastor. This fruitful interview uncovered several helpful ideas for use at Abundant Life and exposed some areas of leadership upon which I, as pastor, could work.

I also interviewed Rev. Michael Wiles, a national church consultant with Next Step, Inc. Due to his busy schedule, the interview took place over the phone, and the conversation

⁴Sue Annis Hammond, *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry* (Bend, OR: Thin Book Publishing 1998), 20-21.

⁵*Ibid.*, 7.

was recorded. Although Wiles was born and raised in Oklahoma, he spent many years in New England, and his answers were insightful and surprising.

From these interviews, I selected three eminent Assembly of God churches within forty minutes of my church for further research and created a set of loosely organized questions for use in the interviews. However, each dialogue differed based on the passion of the pastor. I interviewed the three pastors either in person or via a conference call.

Phase 3—National Church Survey

During Phase 3, the church participated in several surveys. On November, 29, 2009, adults participated in the National Church Survey (NCD) survey in order to determine the church's minimal factors. Next Step Inc. professionally scored the NCD survey. At this same session, forty-five adults also participated in an in-house survey which the church had created. The results of this survey were tabulated by the church (see Appendix H).

Execution of the Project

Appreciative Inquiry

Before the AI session, my assistant pastor Rev. Shirley Ellis⁶ and I hammered out the questions for the meeting. We decided to acquire information regarding the following categories: (1) What does the church do to keep visitors? (2) What do people enjoy most about the church? (3) How do people feel about the children's programs? (4) What do the people like about the worship and preaching of the church? (5) How effective is Abundant Life at helping people through hard times? and (6) How does the ministry of Abundant Life affect its parishioners in everyday life?

⁶Ellis is also a trainer with Pratt and Whitney in East Hartford, Connecticut.

After several drafts, we selected a set of ten questions which I presented to the church on September 5 and 12, 2008. Congregants completed questions 1-5 during the first session, and the remaining questions on the second week. During the sessions, creative ice breakers helped ensure that people felt comfortable enough to answer candidly. Participants seemed to enjoy the meetings.

Pastoral Interviews

Originally, the interviews were supposed to revolve around a set of loosely constructed questions. However, once in the interview process, this approach did not seem productive. Consequently, the interviews began with a set of basic questions, but as the interview progressed, the questions were geared around either the pastors' passion or a topic of personal interest. The answers were extremely impacting to me; I learned much about myself and how to improve my leadership.

On October 17, 2008, I interviewed Rev. Brad Whipple of the Seaport Community Church in Mystic, Connecticut. Brad founded the church nineteen years ago. Today Mystic Seaport Community Church is one of the largest churches in the Eastern Connecticut section of SNED. Although this church did not meet the criteria of being similar in size to Abundant Life, Pastor Brad was raised in this section and familiar with Abundant Life's history. I geared my questions around his strong leadership style to see how he interacts with his board and staff.

I interviewed Rev. Bill Button from the SNED district headquarters at his office in Sturbridge, Massachusetts on November 2, 2009. Button is in charge of church development and church health in the SNED district and very familiar with all the churches in the area. Before his assignment to the district office, Button pastored a church

in Massachusetts near my previous pastorate, so we have a long-term relationship. My specific purpose in this interview was to research trends of church growth in the SNED district, identify what is working in Southern New England, and increase my awareness of potential pitfalls.

I conducted an extensive phone interview with Rev. Marios Elinas, pastor of Valley Shore Community Church in Old Saybrook, Connecticut on November 17, 2009. Elinas took a church that had been stagnant for decades. Now, the church has experienced a full-blown revival and holds multiple services. Nearly 200 people attend every Sunday.

On December 1, 2009, I interviewed Rev. Michael Wiles of Next Step, Inc. Questions focused around the differences between the churches in New England and the Midwest. Wiles asserted that great changes are happening in New England and expressed optimism for the churches.

Rev. Scott Shemeth, pastor of Christian Life Church in Kensington, Connecticut, participated in an interview with me on December 1, 2009. This interview proved to be highly successful because Scott was spiritually raised at Abundant Life church in years past. Since that time, he has become the pastor of a thriving church. Like Rev. Marios Elinas, he took a struggling church and now has nearly 200 people. Pastor Scott, a former evangelist, is highly intelligent and articulate; his leadership style is worth emulating.

Evaluations and Surveys

Rev. Shirley Ellis and I developed a survey of twenty-five questions, ranging from information about who was taking the interview, to what that individual thought about the worship style, decibel volume, length of service, and service times at Abundant Life. We sought to discover the church's preferences regarding small groups and Sunday

school. In addition, the survey focused on gathering information regarding the personal lives of the survey participants on such things as devotional life, Internet pornography, and level of passion for the lost (see Appendix H).

Forty-five people participated in the survey held on November 29, 2009 after the Sunday morning service during the Sunday school hour. Church attendance that Sunday morning was 116, including approximately thirty children. In essence, approximately 52 percent of the congregation participated in the survey.

The answer sheet for the questions was multiple-choice only. I instructed the people not to write notes on the answer sheet so as to keep the responses anonymous. People answered the questions in private so they would feel comfortable in answering the questions candidly. Participants were informed that the answers would be tabulated and shared with the church and used by the church board to further develop the vision of the church.

Results of the Project

Summary of the Appreciative Inquiry

The church discovered that its strength lies in the area of fellowship. People fondly remembered their first visit: all the smiles, handshakes, and the way certain people went out of their way to learn their names. Newcomers were touched with the sense that the congregation generally longed for a move of the Holy Spirit and listened eagerly to the pastor's messages. People expressed their desire to find a church that preached the Bible and was kid-friendly. Church participants indicated a high level of enjoyment in attending the adult Sunday school classes, the annual Vacation Bible Camp, the church picnics, the visitor dinners, the snack times, and the times the pastor took new people out

to lunch. Survey participants pointed out the crucial role small group ministry plays in developing an environment conducive to fellowship. Others expressed appreciation for the church's freedom in worship and the honesty in teaching and preaching, which helped people feel secure.

Many newcomers expressed appreciation for the newcomer's luncheon, which provided a time for getting to know people in the church. Survey participants fondly remembered the prayer times and the way the church rallies around people in need. People expressed their satisfaction with both the children and youth programs, as well as the worship. People genuinely expressed appreciation for how the church ministers to children at their own age level. In addition, survey participants valued the "high accountability" preaching on tithing, family, church, and the Church family worldwide (see Appendix F).

Results of the Interviews

The interviews with successful church leaders proved to be very helpful. Revs. Bill Button, Mario Elinas, Michael Wiles, and Scott Shemeth know the regional culture, and lead successful churches. During the interviews, several recurring themes emerged. First, church leaders in New England are highly encouraged about the church. Each interviewee expressed extreme excitement about the move of God's Spirit in New England. Despite a prior history of being a difficult place to preach the gospel, God is on the move in the New England states. Wiles, a native of Oklahoma, said, "People are people and people everywhere need the gospel."⁷ In addition, he stated that every region of the country faces unique and difficult aspects of ministry. These challenges actually

⁷Rev. Michael Wiles, personal phone interview with author, Manchester, CT, December 1, 2009.

created excitement among the church leaders interviewed. Shemeth stated that a greater percentage of Christians live in China than in New England. Christians comprise nearly 10 percent of the 1.2 billion people in China. By contrast, only 1-2 percent of New England residents are born again.⁸

Second, each interviewee agreed that ministry is hard work. All pastors indicated that their church had grown slowly over years of consistent ministry. Even churches that grew quickly in the beginning found that ministry is hard work and requires a great deal of dedication. Shemeth shed great insight on this issue when he said, “Frankly, I expected the church to explode when I took the pastorate, and we didn’t. We grew one by one; it was hard work. We never just expanded into growth. It was always one by one and a struggle, but it was a good struggle and a good fight.”⁹ Despite the hard work required by ministry, each church leader expressed a deep love of the ministry and determination to do their best.

Third, each church leader recognized the importance of strong, visionary leadership. The church leaders interviewed for this project each possess strong leadership skills and a powerful vision for the future. However, as humble men¹⁰ of God they are keenly aware of their faults yet make no apologies for the task bestowed upon them by God. Shemeth believes that God is the head of the church and that He is manifested through the pastor. The church leaders who participated in the interviews indicated an openness to receive suggestions from their church board, yet ardently believe in their own calling.

⁸These statistics were stated by Scott Shemeth; not quoted from an exact source.

⁹Scott Shemeth, personal phone interview with the author, Kensington, CT, November 19, 2009.

¹⁰I looked for women leaders also, but only men fit my criteria in our area.

Fourth, the church leaders I interviewed all recognized the importance of developing leaders. Elinas meets every week with twelve men to mentor them for ministry. He meets with his staff of leaders every week; once a month he offers an extended meeting to train, disciple, and guide the church. Shemeth, on the other hand, believes the proper way to raise up an effective leader is to “micromanage until competency.” He then releases them, and when they make mistakes, he “backs them.”¹¹

Fifth, all the church leaders I interviewed recognized the importance of prayer in the leader’s life. During the interviews, it became obvious that successful pastors are passionate about their prayer lives. That these leaders believed in prayer was not the surprise; that they strongly believed in receiving their marching orders from the Lord was the key issue. Elinas spends two to three hours every Sunday morning, away from the church building, worshiping God and positioning himself so he can receive from God. He does not spend much time asking God to bless him or the worship service; the goal is to connect with Jesus so that he can be ready to preach the gospel.

Sixth, as church leaders, these men have rediscovered the need for balance between family and the ministry. Elinas clearly communicated the importance of his family to his church when he stated that he would surrender the ministry before he would neglect his family. Shemeth spends time each day in family devotions with his teenage children and looks for opportunities to bond with them.

Results of the NCD Survey

The results of the NCD demonstrated a need to improve the way the church handles spiritual gifts. A score of 51 represents the average national score, and Abundant

¹¹Ibid.

Life scored near this in each of the eight categories (See Table 1 below). The church took the NCD survey for the first time in 2007, at which time the church's weakest category, called the minimal factor, was "Gift-Based Ministry." The 2009 survey results indicated that this continues to be the weakest category, although the numbers indicate improvement over the last two years.

Christian A. Schwarz and Christoph Schalk, in *The Implementation Guide to Natural Church Development*, provide several key checklists for a leadership team to implement in a church to order to improve in a given category. Based on these checklists, Abundant Life needs more teaching about spiritual gifts and how the church practices in the spiritual gifts in the church. The leadership team must help the church congregants discern their spiritual gifts and coach them in their usage. Far too often, the church has allowed anyone to fill ministry positions. However, the church must now encourage the people to participate in ministries once a person discovers his or her spiritual gift(s). This might require a person to try several ministries in order to identify his or her individual gifts. NCD calls for gift counselors and coaching, even before a person becomes a Christian, because church attendees must be consciously linked to ministries.

Although a church might be tempted to work on improving more than one of the eight categories, NCD suggests that "at least one of the eight quality characteristics always deserves special attention from the church leadership, and one can confidently expect that energy invested in that area will benefit the overall development of the congregation."¹² Based on the research of NCD, the church will benefit most by

¹²Christian A Schwarz and Christoph Schalk, *Implementation Guide to Natural Church Development* (Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1998), 122.

concentrating on developing this minimal factor of gift-based ministry, which, in turn, will take care of many other areas.

According to the 2009 NCD survey, Abundant Life scored below the national average in the area of “Loving Relationships.” That result was surprising because it did not seem to agree with other internal surveys; however, this could be the result of internal definitions that differ from those of NCD. The church was encouraged to see that the two categories greatly increased from the 2007 survey results. “Empowering Leadership” increased by more than ten points. Since leadership is the distinctive of growing churches, this came as a pleasant surprise. According to the NCD checklist, this means the pastor has a good idea of where he is going in the church and has developed short-, medium-, and long-term objectives for church development. This category also indicates that the church believes the pastor spends time in prayer to receive the vision for the church.

Table 1. NCD Results for Abundant Life of the Assemblies of God—November 30, 2009.

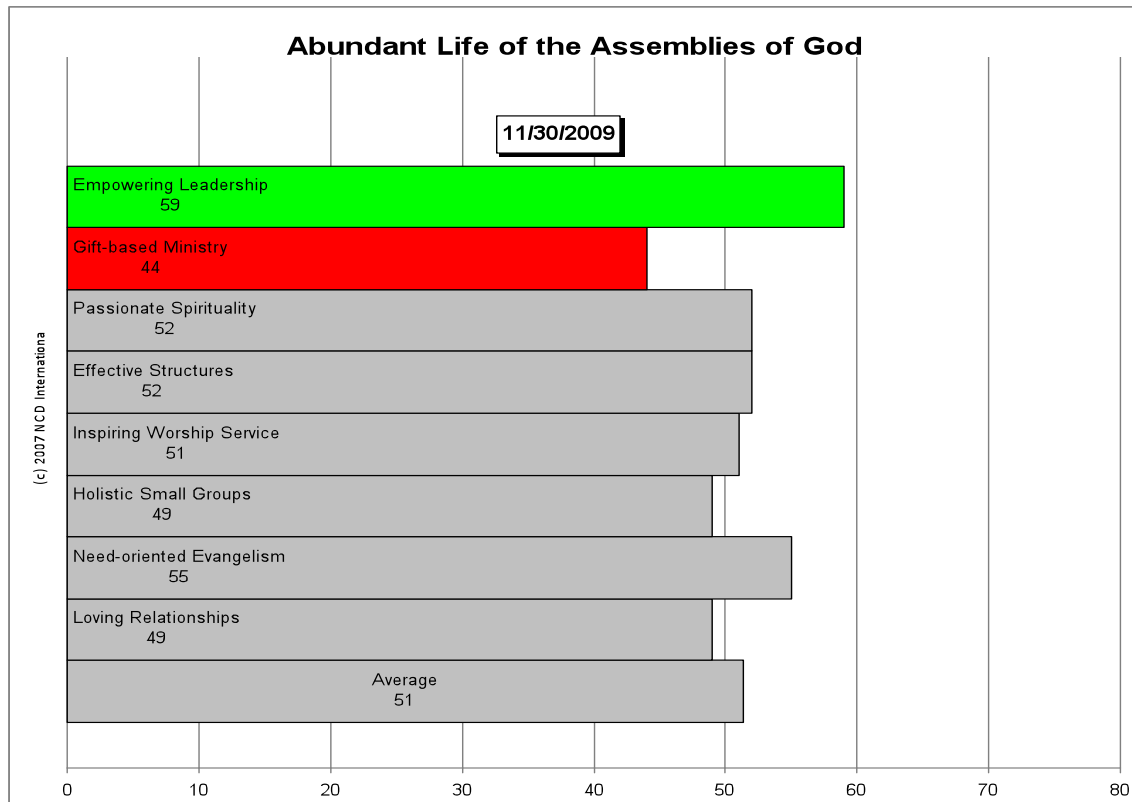
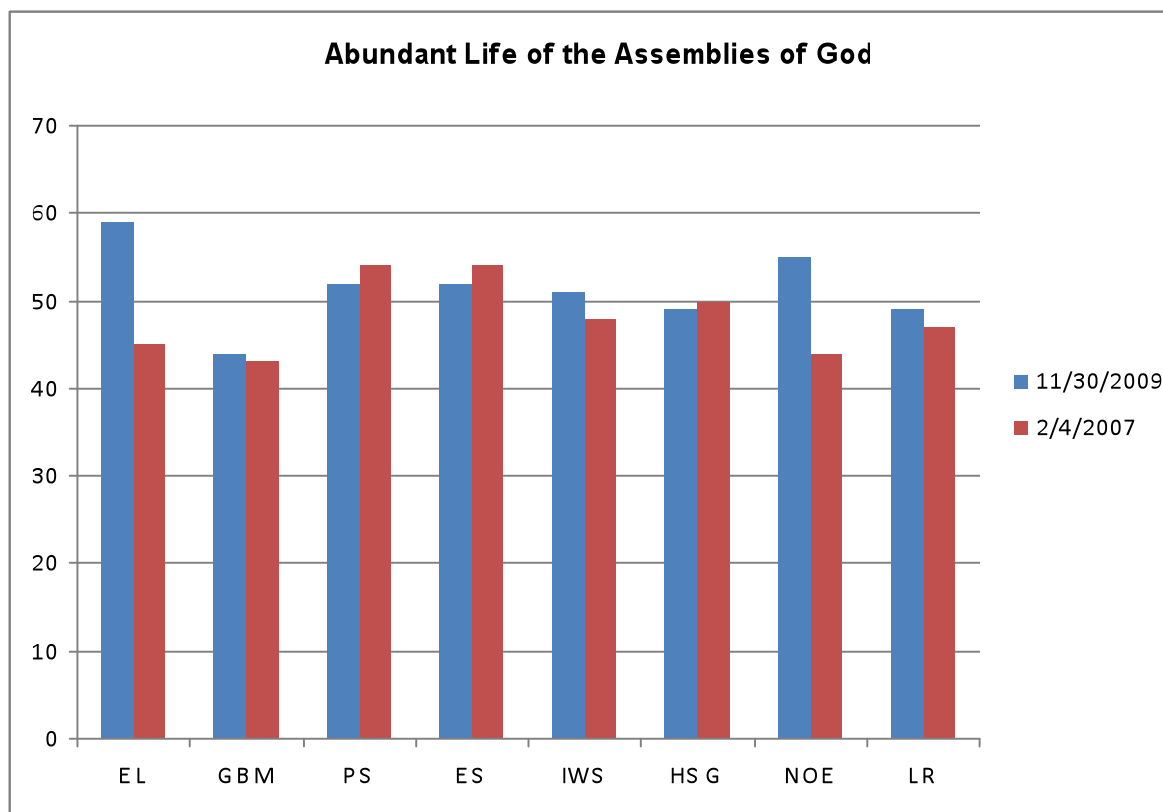


Table 2. 2007/2009 Comparison of NCD Survey Results



Abundant Life Church Assessment

Forty-five adults from Abundant Life Assembly of God participated in the church assessment survey (see Appendix H). The numbers in parentheses report how many people voted for a given question, and the percentage is based on that number and not forty-five. From the survey, it became apparent that Abundant Life is a balanced church. The church has a fair number of new people; however, over 26 percent of the people in the church have a strong spiritual foundation with over 51 percent of the people having been in the church more than five years. Although the majority of the people who attend Abundant Life are close to the age of the pastor (52), the church also incorporates a strong balance of younger people. Most people are happy or, at least satisfied, in their marriage.

By and large, the people appear satisfied with the way the pastor manages the church services; only a few people expressed a desire to change the worship time or the length of the services. The majority think the sermons are the right length and appear pleased with the quality of the messages. On the other hand, approximately 32.5 percent of the attendees want more in-depth, scriptural messages.

The survey indicated that the church is divided over worship styles. This came as a surprise because this almost never comes up in church conversation. The worship team plays mostly contemporary music, with a mid-western flavor: 33.6 percent of the people think the worship team plays the right balance, 15.5 percent believe the worship is too contemporary, and 20 percent believe it is not contemporary enough. Unfortunately, these results may appear futile since no explanation was given at the time of the survey regarding the definition of the words “contemporary” and “traditional.” To some people contemporary means loud drums, while to others, it means not having the mid-western flavor.

The church service begins at 9:30 on Sunday morning. Sunday school is held at 11:15 a.m., immediately following the morning service. While many people voiced the opinion that 9:30 a.m. is too early, 67.4 percent of the people did not want to change the time for the morning worship time, and 69.4 percent of the people did not want to change the time for Sunday school. Sixty-nine percent of the people said they were involved in Sunday school, yet no doubt this result is jaded because the survey was held during the Sunday school hour. The survey, disappointingly, indicated that only 39.5 percent of the people regularly attend a mid-week small group, and 18.6 percent only attend occasionally.

The survey showed that the people of the church spend regular time in prayer (37 percent) and Bible reading (38 percent). The most surprising result was that 57.1 percent of the people who took the survey spend more than an hour each week in family devotions. In addition, the survey results indicated that 81.8 percent of the Christians in the church deeply care about the lost and are not derailed by Internet pornography.

The Project's Contribution to Ministry

The successful completion of this project benefited both my personal leadership style and Abundant Life and will no doubt continue to do so. First, the project helped me progress as a leader in that in the past, I relied too heavily on public opinion and how people received an idea, but as a result of this project I have renewed confidence to lead and to progress in my leadership ability.

Second, this project also benefited Abundant Life, through fulfilling one of the project's goals—to discover the best ways to grow a church in New England. As a result of this research one key to an effective strategic growth plan was the importance of providing a strong vision in order for the church to experience genuine fruitfulness. This strategic growth plan, that is constantly being developed now includes: (1) a church where each Christian discovers his or her spiritual gift and matures in it, (2) a church where people can find Christ, (3) a church where a strong pastor constantly serves people through the hard times in life, (4) a church that will celebrate a life of prayer and the family, and (5) a church that has a godly effect on the town of Colchester, Connecticut.

As a result of that renewed vision, the local church has experienced both some apparent numerical¹³ and spiritual growth as a result of participation in this project, and we anticipate further growth as the church and people of the church mature. That growth will no doubt come slowly and often with great pain and effort, as ministry is hard work. I pray that the attendees of Abundant Life will grow and mature and become increasingly hungry to see a move of God in both their local church and New England.

¹³The ACMR for 2008 stated the Sunday Morning attendance was 125. Lately, it is not unusual to have 130-135 people on a Sunday.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT SUMMARY

Evaluation of the Project

The purpose of this chapter is to evaluate the effectiveness of the research for this project and to suggest some areas for improvement. This chapter will also bring together the findings for this project, provide recommendations for other churches in New England, and suggest additional areas for further study.

The aim of this project was to research better ways to grow Abundant Life Church in light of the challenges of its New England context. As a result of this project, I am convinced that it is possible to grow the church anyplace in the country, including New England. The project included personal interviews with pastors of successful, growing churches, research of both biblical foundations for church growth and current church growth literature, and ascertained the health of Abundant Life in Colchester, Connecticut through the use of the Natural Church Development survey by Next Step, Inc.

Keys to Project Effectiveness

Effectiveness in church growth requires a team of dedicated Christians willing to make the necessary changes in order to facilitate growth within the church. This, in turn, requires the development of leaders who passionately serve the Lord by using their God-given gifts. Effective church growth at Abundant Life must be sustained over the long haul; therefore, involvement of people through team ministry is vital. Since this project focused primarily on Abundant Life in Colchester, Connecticut, the results of this project

would have been impossible without the cooperation and participation of church members who took the surveys and provided input through the Appreciative Inquiry process. In addition, their support and practical application of information learned through regular sermons served as a vital part of this research. The church's willingness to grow, change, and allow me to grow as their pastor is clearly a major reason for the success of this project.

Interviews with church pastors and leaders played a vital role in the effectiveness of this project. Insights shared by these pastors and leaders genuinely changed my life as a leader and provided personal inspiration, encouragement, and godly examples of Christian servanthood. The friendship I developed with these leaders opened the door for further mentoring by these sterling examples of church leadership. Their insights into leadership will serve as an ongoing source of inspiration and accountability as I lead Abundant Life in the ongoing process of growth.

Keys to Project Improvement

The goal of the Appreciative Inquiry was to discover the church's areas of strength. One of the tenets of Appreciative Inquiry is that what people focus on tends to become a reality; therefore, the church must focus on loving people by extending friendliness and warmth. The Appreciative Inquiry session was successful; however, I believe it would have been more productive if I could have participated in the seminary-level training made available to most students. Nevertheless, with additional personal research, I believe the Appreciative Inquiry served as a powerful tool for change at Abundant Life.

Research for this project focused on church growth at Abundant Life in Colchester, Connecticut which is part of the Southern New England District of the Assemblies of God. Consequently, all research was done within the denominational boundaries. I believe unique and valuable information could have been gathered by incorporating research from other denominations with similar belief systems.

Church surveys utilized in this project only scratched the surface in assisting the church in ascertaining areas for change and growth. If I were to do the surveys again, I would conduct one at the beginning of the project and another at the conclusion of the project. In so doing, the church would have been able to chart any perceived development in the health of the church. In addition, the church leadership would have been better equipped to develop the people or programs based on perceived needs or weaknesses. For instance, in the Appreciative Inquiry survey, the results indicated that the church needed to develop more efficient ways of handling visitors. If this could have been known at the beginning of the project, church leaders could have tracked the results and used those findings to develop new programs and plans that would keep a higher percentage of new visitors.

Perception regarding small groups serves as another illustration of how a pre- and post-survey could have been helpful. The survey at the end of the project indicated that the church does not perceive small groups as an effective tool for church growth. If these results had been known a year ago, I could have preached a sermon series on the need for fellowship and community or the small group leaders could have focused on reaching out for more people. Unfortunately, the church leadership failed to recognize that the church did not see small groups as a vital aspect of church growth. If we had taken the poll

twice, we would have had statistics by which to measure whether past efforts resulted in change or needed course adjustments.

Development of a more precise in-house survey would have improved the effectiveness of the project. The purpose of the survey was to find solutions to church growth problems but, in the end, the survey seemed to focus more on the secret lives of the church people. Although knowing how many people had a true passion for the lost was helpful, it did little good without a plan to put that passion into action.

Even though the church willingly participated in the in-house survey and Appreciative Inquiry process, I believe this portion of the project could have been more successful if I had implemented teams within the church to do field research in other churches. I consumed so much energy informing and convincing the church leadership to consider the adoption of a program or idea I had discovered from another church. If teams of church members had participated in the field research, their input would have easily convinced the church leadership to consider the use of new ideas. However, the logistics of sending out field research teams to distant churches has its challenges; the people qualified to participate in these teams are very involved in ministry in the church, and being gone over a Sunday is difficult. Hopefully, the research conducted for this project will encourage the current leadership to investigate and adopt anointed ideas from local, like-faith churches. After all, the research and interviewing process need not conclude with the completion of this particular project.

Implications of the Project

Christ gave the Church a very important mandate, yet this calling clashes with a society that does not care for the Church. New England churches desperately need

renewal, and the churches must come up with innovations to win the lost. This project investigated better methods and characteristics of growing New England churches, and the results provided the basis for the following seven implications.

First, Abundant Life will continue using Natural Church Development with a follow-up survey in 2010. One of the strong beliefs of Natural Church Development is that when the church strengthens one factor, it results in strengthening other factors of church health. In order to increase Abundant Life's minimal factor of gift-based ministry, Christian A. Schwarz suggests utilizing sermons, Bible studies, and seminars to create better church understanding.¹ By implementing these ideas, Abundant Life will focus on helping individual Christians discover their gifts. Natural Church Development suggests raising up gift counselors, whose ministry is to develop Christians in the area of spiritual gifts.

Second, churches in the New England region need to work together as a team by sharing ideas, resources, and encouragement. Only together can the church accomplish the Great Commission. For too long, churches have viewed other churches as competitors instead of co-workers in the Kingdom of God. Whereas sharing ideas and resources is more difficult in sparsely populated New England areas than in major cities, church leaders need to make the necessary sacrifices so as to increase the effectiveness of ministry in this region that desperately needs a Savior. When one church of like faith grows, it blesses all the churches in the region.

Third, pastors must exercise their leadership responsibility by presenting an exciting and vibrant vision to the congregation. Throughout this research project, the

¹Christian A. Schwarz and Christoph Schalk, *Implementation Guide to Natural Church Development* (Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1998), 56.

subject of leadership came up again and again. People hunger for strong, loving, understanding leadership; they yearn to see a clear picture from the pulpit of where the church is headed. As a pastor, I take pleasure in coming up with new and stirring ideas and having my church leadership improve and refine them. In so doing, the church recognizes that the vision of the church is not just the pastor's dream, but a vision for the future shared by everyone in the congregation. This atmosphere yields unity, synergy, and fruitfulness.

Fourth, Abundant Life and other churches that hunger to grow must set up a blueprint of activities that will enable the congregation to discover its strengths and build on them. Every church has strengths and weaknesses; when a church spends most of its energy on fixing anemic areas, the church will be negatively focused. On the other hand, when the congregation discovers what it is good at, the wise leadership team will capitalize, communicate, and highlight those strengths.

At the same time, each church has weak areas that need improvement. The leadership team must identify these weaknesses and admit to them without accepting them as lifelong. A church can benefit from focusing effort on improving one weak factor. Abundant Life is challenged in the area of Gift Based Ministry. Consequently, during 2010, the pastor and church leadership team will seek to improve this area and make it the church's strength. According to the Natural Church Development survey, an average score is 51. In the area of Gift Based Ministry, Abundant Life moved from a score of 41 in 2007 to a score of 44 in 2009. Therefore, the church still has much room for continued improvement in this area (see Appendix G).

Fifth, Abundant Life must discover a new passion for the message and the mission of God's church. One of the greatest dangers in church leadership is striving for mere survival. After time, a leader can figure out ways to keep the church barely living, devoid of passion, lacking excitement, and deprived of God's true direction for the church. Each pastor must diligently seek the direction for the church from the true director of the Church—the Holy Spirit. Only this vibrant, exciting vision from God will enable leaders to confront the discouraging times that come to every minister of the gospel.

Sixth, Abundant Life must constantly reinvent itself while staying true to its God-given mission and, at the same time, being mindful of how complicated change is in the local church. A church congregation needs time to make necessary adjustments. The sensitive pastor will know when to push for change, while still honoring the traditions of the congregation. Leaders walk a tightrope in this regard; they must honor the church's history without stifling God's purposes because of church tradition. For Abundant Life, this transition will be evident when people dispose of expressions such as: "We've always done things that way," or "It was good enough for Paul." Abundant Life needs to rediscover what the Bible has to say about the mission of the church and then carefully translate God's mission into New England culture.

Abundant Life cannot slack off and live on yesterday's success and glory. God has called every church to work until Jesus returns. As long as the church can extend the gospel to people who have never had a positive presentation of the good news of Jesus, the church, with increasing passion, must seek ways to more effectively reach the lost and meet the needs of those within the church. Abundant Life has been called to take the

Great Commission seriously; therefore, the leadership of the church must constantly search for strategies that can reach the unsaved people of Colchester, Connecticut and its surrounding area. Abundant Life cannot possibly reach the entire area but it can do its part as one player in a large team of churches. As the church grows, its leaders must learn the best way to deal with the people and their needs.

Seventh, to consummate God's call, the Church must stress the power of the cross. As Paul declared, "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power" (1 Cor. 1:17). Paul's primary mission was to preach, not in his own ability, power, or wisdom, but in the power of the Holy Spirit. In the same way, Abundant Life must rely on the power of the cross rather than getting in the Holy Spirit's way. For believers, the cross represents salvation; it is the very expression of God's love and power. When a Christian experiences this glorious power, it brings safety and security, even in the face of death. In the cross, God's great power and love for a lost and dying world is revealed. Anything appended to this would indeed deplete the results.

In the twenty-first century, the Church must realize that things have changed. In the past, people had a working knowledge of Christ and the Bible and needed to be convinced about the things of God. Today, however, people do not even have a basic understanding of the Bible and they want to experience God before they believe. This longing to experience God gives the Pentecostal church an edge in this culture. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, people can experience God in a powerful and life-changing manner.

Recommendations to the Churches of the Southern New England District

The church in America is at a crucial time in its history and, during this time, the church must rise to new levels of excellence. Therefore, the Assemblies of God and its educational institutions must discover new ways to train leaders and to develop the pastors of the Church. The Assemblies of God should be at the forefront of innovation when it comes to reviving God's houses of worship rather than garnering everything from other like-faith churches.

In order to facilitate this innovation, the Southern New England District of the Assemblies of God Fellowship must facilitate ways for pastors to share ideas through the Internet or during sectional meetings and district councils. Encouraging pastors to share ideas could help the average New England pastor who easily develops feelings of isolation. If quality New England church leaders had a platform whereby they could share valuable information with other New England church leaders, the church could replicate success in greater measure. What works in one New England church could potentially help another struggling New England church move into success. Pastors could share a plethora of ideas, such as: (1) how to handle the increasingly busy schedule of church people, (2) how to disciple new believers while not retarding the growth of the seasoned saints, (3) how to conduct effective outreach ministries, (4) how to close the back door and retain visitors who become effective church members.

Second, the discontinuation of the territorial mentality among local pastors could dramatically impact the growth of the church in New England. Each Bible-believing church should view other Bible-believing churches as an integral part of the body of Christ. As pastors pray for other churches in their local community, God's favor will

come on all the churches. Rather than remaining segregated in separate silos, pastors and churches must follow Christ's command to be one as He is one with God (John 20:21).

Experience indicates that tough times tend to bring strangers together; during these challenging days, may the Assemblies of God churches walk in unity and brotherly love.

Third, Assemblies of God churches must remain unapologetically Pentecostal. Although pastors might be tempted to mainstream the church service in order to satisfy congregants who have never experienced revival, Pentecost equals power. The Assemblies of God must train Assemblies of God pastors, especially the younger leaders, how to lead Pentecostal services. Since the average Assemblies of God church has a steady influx of new people, pastors should steadily emphasize the message of Pentecost, the usage of the spiritual gifts, and the unity of the Spirit. Each new convert must be taught the ways of the Spirit, and each church pastor needs to regularly teach on the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Since so many younger leaders in the Assemblies of God have never witnessed a genuine Pentecostal revival, mentoring the younger leaders in the moving of the Holy Spirit could prove highly effective.

Fourth, innovation and change can never replace the power of intercessory prayer. Pentecostal pastors ought to lead in prayer, teach on prayer, and, in prayer, seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit for the church. Only when the church is empowered by the Spirit through the power of prayer will it honor the Holy Spirit.

Each church must develop a central prayer ministry. When I surveyed the successful pastors, they stated that definite, intense prayer was a key to victory in their church. Therefore, the church must do more than pray; it should develop prayer teams who are trained in how to intercede for the church. The pastor must guide the church in

praying specific prayers, believing God is able to help the church disciple leaders and to grow the church. Prayer warriors must especially pray for the health of the church and ask God to give the leadership a clear vision for God's will.

Fifth, every church ought to take the NCD survey in order to determine the church's minimal factor—the weak area out of the eight factors surveyed. Upon determining the church's minimal factor, the church should dedicate the following year to improving that area of the church; the following year, the survey might verify another weak area and, in turn, the church could improve that area. After a few years of this work, the church would increase in health and naturally grow.

Conversely, every church must determine its best qualities and build on them. I recommend that every pastor learn the methods of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and involve the congregation in an AI session to determine what the church does best. Too often a church only works on its weak areas. Just as a person should focus on his or her spiritual gift and natural talents, the church must focus on what it does best without neglecting other areas. When Abundant Life discovered that fellowship was its best quality, we immediately designed ways to capitalize on this vital area of the church.

Sixth, each church must be proactive in developing leaders. When a church finds that it is merely filling ministry positions out of need, the church is adversely affected. Churches ought to develop the mindset of constantly raising up leaders even when a key position is filled. The church should develop a mindset of continual leadership development. I also recommend that the Southern New England District extend their leadership development programs and make them more affordable for the smaller church.

Lastly, each leader must be careful to develop a balance between ministry and family. All too often, the church grows at the expense of the pastors' family. I strongly urge lay people to take up their call to ministry. In so doing, they can lighten the load of the pastor and encourage the pastor to spend time with his or her family. The church must ensure that the pastor keeps life in the proper priority: God first, family second, and the ministry, third. This should be vocalized in leadership meetings and general worship services. The pastor cannot afford to lose his or her children while overly committed to the church and ministry.

Recommendations for Further Study

Spending a significant amount of time studying ways to improve a church's health and numerical growth naturally opens up new avenues of curiosity for further learning. As I completed the research for this project, I became convinced of the value to grow as a leader. However, I also recognized the need to increase the leadership abilities of those who serve with me at Abundant Life. I see a great need to dig deeper to learn methods of training and raising up leaders. This includes the areas of how to make personal devotions more meaningful, discern God's vision, work together with a team, develop in one's personal evangelism, and balance ministry and family life.

A sports team is always on the lookout to replace players who are near retirement age. In the same way a church leader should progress toward the future; pastors must always be looking to raise up people for leadership—not just when an emergency need arises. Further study on such leadership topics as the spiritual growth of the leader, how to use the leader's God-given mental capacities, and how to balance a person's secular

work life with his or her ministry would greatly benefit both Abundant Life's leadership team as well as congregation.

Another interesting study would be to further examine how to better coordinate the spiritual gifts in the local church. Churches need Pentecostal power in the worship services; however, confusion over the use of spiritual gifts can cause more harm than good. As the church reaches out to new people who will be uninformed of the spiritual gifts, leaders must know how to disciple and train them how to better manage the gifts in the worship service and in their Christian life in general. Regrettably, some churches avoid the spiritual gifts in the worship service. If we are not careful, the Assemblies of God will lose its distinctive as a Spirit-filled, Spirit-anointed fellowship. I am convinced that each Christian needs one-on-one counseling to help Christians both discern and develop their individual gifts.

From my research, I also concluded that a vital small group ministry would help a church feel more connected and needed. I would enjoy further study relative to taking the small group ministry to the next step, to make it more central to everyone in the church. In most New England churches, small group ministry is still relatively new. This study could include further leadership development in groups and how to involve a greater percentage of the church people.

Finally, much work has been accomplished for outreach through churches praying together and even sharing ideas, but I believe that congregations across the Greater Colchester area could benefit by taking the next step. As two or more churches share resources, people, and equipment and join forces toward the goal of winning the Colchester community for Christ, this Kingdom of God can go forward. Such an

endeavor will require further study as to the best ways to work together to this end—and for God's glory.

Conclusion

Jesus bestowed on the Church His Great Commission; thus, every church that seeks to please Christ must discover effective methods and plans to reach others with this message of love. His Church has always been the best way to win others for Christ, but only healthy churches can fulfill that mission. In light of that reality, and since church health leads to natural church growth, this project considered strategies for bringing health to Abundant Life in Colchester, Connecticut so that it might grow in numbers and in outreach to Colchester and its surrounding region.

Part of this strategy included discovering the strengths and weakness of the church and learning how to capitalize on each through the tools of Appreciate Inquiry and Natural Church Development.

Every church needs growing leaders who hunger and thirst to lead the congregation toward church health. Thus, this project researched how I as pastor could mature as a leader and develop not only my leadership skills, but also the leadership skills of those who work for Christ in the Abundant Life—resulting in strong, ever growing, Christ-like leadership.

APPENDIX A

NOTES FROM INTERVIEW WITH REV. BRAD WHIPPLE OF SEAPORT COMMUNITY CHURCH MYSTIC, CONNECTICUT

What keeps you from becoming burnt out?

- 1) I know the call; it would be a huge mistake to leave.
- 2) I have a great latitude as a church planter.
- 3) I have a strong vision and passion for this church.
- 4) The church enables me to change and reinvent myself and ministry.

What do you do to stay fresh?

- 1) I try to take one week a year off on my motorcycle.
- 2) Took off a whole month recently; it helped me to realize the value of the church.
- 3) I try to be simplistic in preaching and teaching.
- 4) My strength comes from remaining in the presence of the Lord. God speaks to me so clearly.

Speak to me about change:

- 1) I must stay aggressive.
- 2) If I don't continually change, I die,
- 3) I get bored easily.
- 4) If we are not effective, we kill it. (The entire church knows it.)
- 5) I create a culture of expectation within the church. "The only constant is change."

How do you handle rejection in the ministry?

- 1) Sometimes I do get bitter
- 2) Recently, I had a falling out; I realize that bitterness will poison me and the church.
- 3) I recently read 2 Corinthians: "Everyone has left me." I tell myself to shut up.
- 4) Have a long staff meeting every week. Says, he's not sure if he's effective.

How about in your private life?

Depression – Fighting the depression that comes through discouragement

APPENDIX B

RECORDED INTERVIEW WITH BILL BUTTON, CHURCH DIRECTOR OF THE SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND DISTRICT OF THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD STURBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS NOVEMBER 2, 2009

The purpose of this interview is to explore the uniqueness of the church in New England. What would you say to a church leader who resides in another part of the country? How is it going in Southern New England?

I believe the greatest challenge for church growth in America is right here in southern New England. We have often stated that in our own tri-state area the needs from our own statistics that Pastor Bob talks about a lot. We put them together our first year I came into this office in 2000. At our first District Council, we took a look at each Section and did a population versus how many are in attendance and we have 11 million people and about 27-28,000 people on any given Sunday in our churches. Now, granted, there are also many evangelical churches in our area, but the work is here, the field is ripe for the harvest. I believe it is a great opportunity.

What are some things you are optimistic about?

I am generally an optimistic person. I look at challenges as opportunities. Yes, I believe it is opportunistic for any of us. This is why I do not like to close a church. I have been working now in Southern New England District for nine years and it's very rare that I'm going to recommend we close the church because I want that preaching point. If there are a few thousand people from any town: I say let's reach them for Jesus.

What are the challenges for church leaders in Southern New England?

I believe there are two tracks we run on: one is the churches that are in existence and have been in existence for some time, and the other is church plants. I believe those are two totally different sets of challenges.

My church has been in existence for almost 60 years. Then you have churches which have only been in existence for a year and are nearly identical in size. Why are some of these new church plants taking off with great numbers when our established churches are not?

Okay, let's go down the established church path: John Maxwell said it very well: "Everything rises and falls on leadership." Leadership is always the key. Does the pastor lead the church in growth principles? I believe a healthy church is going to be talking about church health, keeping them on task: what are we here for? Let's face it, we know how to do church. But is doing church what it's about?

Are we keeping the question before the people? We need to stay on track. We need to keep our people excited about reaching souls for Jesus. In new church plants that's what they're all about and they know that. These churches are not going to survive unless they are reaching people for Jesus. Churches that are established know how to do church and tend to get into the ruts of doing programs.

In other words, the whole administration of having church takes away from the burden?

Again, statistically, most people coming to faith are coming through churches that are newly planted.

That's good for the church plant: but what about the established church. What can we do get out of that rut?

It comes from the leader and depending on how that leader leads somehow they need to be raising up the leadership in that church, raising the bar, reaching people for Jesus. How are we reaching people for Christ in our community? How are we taking advantage of the opportunities we have every day, outside of the doors of the church? It's about loving people to Jesus and what does that look like? Are we hearing those stories within the confines of the church? Are we seeing, not just new people in the church, because we all know about transfer growth, but are we seeing pre-Christian people come to church? Are we hearing the stories of them becoming Christ followers? Because that's what's going to ignite others.

In my own church it's almost like it's a different church even though we are nearly 60 years old. When we moved and when we change the name, built the new building, some people would return for a visit only after say 4 to 5 years to not know anyone. But the problem is we have incurred such building debt, I understand exactly what you're saying that so much of the focus is in the running and administration of the church that you almost forget those on the outside who Christ died for. So you have to keep focus: it's hard.

It is hard.

I know you experienced this when you pastored the church in Falmouth, Massachusetts.

We had a huge debt, we didn't even have a sanctuary, but we worked our way through it and God blessed it, but it is a challenge for the pastor or pastoral team to keep that clear vision before the people on what we are about—reaching people for Christ.

Can you give me some positive examples from churches in your district that are growing—preferably churches more our size?

You mentioned the key one: Mike Sorinneli (Agawam, MA) is doing a fantastic job and that church is now consistently running around one hundred people. They don't have their own building yet, but we are hearing it across the nation that building is not everything.

But I have read that in New England is more important than in other places to have a building.

I believe it is.

Perhaps it's my excuse.

It also comes with its own challenges, as you well know. Number one: mortgage. Number two: upkeep. Number three: daily utilities. There is a lot to owning a building and there's a lot to be said about not owning a building. For the reasons not stated, most people look to a building and people like to see a church steeple. Our culture here in the Northeast still likes the white church with the steeple and all it represents.

Brian Tracy in Wilbraham is a tremendous example of a church that continues to grow with their focus on the community. They draw from Springfield and are mostly upper-middle-class.

Jack Richards in Springfield, more toward your size, has been there for a long time, doing a very good job.

Two church plants that are in the works: Stephen Crino going into Westerly, Rhode Island right on the border of Eastern Connecticut with a population of about 20,000 people. We already have one church there. Steve had his first preview service and had 40 some odd people.

Nick Fatato started the Common Church in downtown Boston and in the two preview services had around 50 people.

In Beverly, Massachusetts, Rich Cortez is running almost 100 people after only two

years. They are meeting at a school and have great access to the school.

Mark Boucher of Leominster, Massachusetts keeps the vision in front of the people.

Scott Shemeth, came to faith as an engineer. He is doing a bang up job there in Kensington, Connecticut. There are many others. It's interesting we tend not to focus on the success stories but we tend to focus on those that need help.

Gary Collettte took over a church in Leominster, Massachusetts with about 12 people and today they are running a couple a hundred. Right in the center of the state.

So we do have some optimistic stories?

Definitely, we tend to focus on the negative but there are some great churches out there. The Brockton church is a great solid church.

If you were to leave this position and pastor again, what would you do differently than you did before because of your experience?

I pray about that every day! We have pastor's hearts and so, there are many things I would do differently just having worked with people and churches over these nine years. Yesterday was my ninth anniversary. Specifically, I would make sure we are focusing on raising up leaders that are biblically-focused, outward-focused. My last church, sad to say, at times was about paying the bills and it cannot be about that if we are going to reach our community for Christ and if we are really going make a difference.

I would have a stronger missions giving program as well. That helps believers to have an outward focus. Too many of our established churches have a focus that is inward—it's all about us and how we do church, the programs we have in place and it needs to be about the community around the church.

The key is the mission and vision of the church. Is the church about discipleship and outreach: that type of thing?

I have known you for about 20 years now, and maybe I'm wrong, but it seems like the pace of lifestyle has increased so much. Do you agree? It's not as easy to disciple people today. Even in the 14 years I have been in my present church, it seems like people are much busier.

I believe you're right. Our culture in New England and all across the country is becoming busier, but we need to be intentional about discipleship. I believe in small groups and that's where discipleship needs to take place. That is where we can raise up those leaders that will help disciple others. It can't be all about the pastor. The

pastor has to raise up other leaders in the church. That's what we are called to do anyway!

What do you mean, some churches make it all about the pastor?

It's all about the pastor's ability to lead the church. The church will only grow to the level that the pastor can handle: maybe 100, 150. Once that pastor learns to develop other leaders in good leadership principles than that goes way beyond and the pastor learns to raise up others in ministry and gives them opportunities. If we are going to reach our community, we have to go beyond that.

Here's a question I asked so many people: Why is it so much harder in New England than say Missouri where you and I both lived for a time?

It's one we all wrestle with and, in all honesty, I don't believe it's any harder here. I don't believe we are as focused as we should be. I believe New Englanders are upfront, and they will tell you what they feel. That's a difference. In some areas of the country you have those who claim Christianity, but in practice are really not. We have a well-educated culture around here so that goes against this to some degree. But we have to put those in places of ministry who are well-educated and who can speak to the well-educated. We have an affluent area that goes against us. There is old money here and I believe that plays a part—money that has been around generationally. So you have a culture where people will rely on their own resources and finances and building relationships.

But we tend to do church for the church. In Missouri, you don't have a large Catholic community. In New England we have one of the largest Catholic communities, so we have to reach outside and be focused on the pre-Christian. We have to be about what the Bible is about: reaching our neighborhood for Jesus Christ.

You use that word, 'pre-Christian' a lot.

Yes, I look at people as either pre-Christian or Christ followers. So what are we doing to reach the pre-Christian in our area? That's a question that needs to be asked more often.

A couple of years ago, my family and I spent Christmas in Springfield. Our kids are out there in graduate school. It was a world of difference. There were manger scenes at McDonald's; you do not see that in New England. The culture is more accepting of the Christian message whereas here, it is to the point now and anti-Christian in many ways and it is becoming so stronger and stronger.

Do you buy into the concept that it's more a spiritual battle here?

Yes, to what degree I don't know.

I've heard people say that because we had the great revivals here under Jonathan Edwards that maybe we're more under attack spiritually.

We have become cold and callous. I believe that Europe is a picture of where we are going and they are only a few years ahead of where we're headed unless we see another revival in New England.

What frustrates you about the pastors in your jurisdiction? You want to go up and shake them because...?

Don't do church like it was done in the 60s. We have to create a culture where we are reaching out to that community. What does it look like? I'm not saying be totally seeker-sensitive, but there is some truth in that. If we are doing church like we did in the 60s, 70s or even the 80s, we are missing the mark. We know how to do church and we know how to reach our community.

What about Nelson Searcy? I like his stuff and a lot of our people follow him.

We use his book for church launches.

But, he's not Pentecostal. How is that affecting our churches? For instance, here's a big problem in my church: Length of the service time. Half says the worship service is too short and others too long. A few say it's the perfect length. Nelson would say keep it at a little bit over an hour and some in my church say: "If you're not in church for hours and hours you're not spiritual." So what is a church going to be like in 20 years if we follow this system's teachings?

There are good points and bad points to any system. Searcy's systems are important for all of our churches. The weakness of most Pentecostal churches is we tend to run them on no systems. But, everything is not systems and that's the strength of the Pentecostal atmosphere. One of the things we've lost is the Sunday night service, which traditionally have allowed for more moving of the Spirit. That needs to happen in different venues and that's where the small group comes in. But they need specific direction and once again it's the training of leaders to allow that to take place. It also must take place during Sunday morning services.

I don't think there's anything wrong with having an altar call and then dismissing the congregation allowing people to tarry at the altar so that those who need to leave are free to go and you've given them the blessing to go but allowing others to stay. That's the way I used to run services at my last church.

It is very difficult in my church because it's such a social church. When we dismiss they all get talking loudly.

We need to lead by instructing people every service about altar calls.

Weren't you raised in a Pentecostal church?

Yes, I was raised AG.

Do you think we've become less Pentecostal?

Yes, we have.

Does that concern you?

Yes. In some places we've been ashamed to be Pentecostal and we can't be—that is our strength.

We were on the outside looking in. We were not part of the norm. We went through the late 60s and 70s revivals that swept across America and our churches began to grow. It began to grow because of the Pentecostal message.

I'm concerned people do become ashamed. Not because of Pentecost, but because they see so much that is not real. Mrs. Jones puts on a weekly show.

Where is the pastor when Mrs. Jones puts on a show? The church that I was raised in, the pastor would stand up and tell people when things were out of order.

Was it well received?

Not always, but the majority of the times we learned to be thoroughly Pentecostal and not offensive. There were times the pastor had to be the pastor and shepherd the flock and had to protect the church from the false prophets who would come in. The pastor still needs to step up and say: "Enough is enough."

I'm convinced this is a big problem in my church: we have a lot of new people and half like old-time Pentecost and the other half of the church is new and like new ways.

We've got to touch certain themes on an ongoing basis: stewardship and the Pentecostal message. The teaching of Corinthians 12-14 is so important. Where are we doing that? That gives the guidelines. It talks about the abuses and why Paul gave the corrections. That is so helpful to the Pentecostal church.

What are we if we're not Pentecostal? Either we believe or we don't. Does it need correction: yes! Does it need guidance? Yes. What about churches that put up signs in the church saying, "There'll be no speaking in tongues in the morning services"? What are they?

What about the service length: has it changed?

When I was a boy, Sunday school was always better attended than the Sunday morning service. Through the late 60s and 70s, the church began to grow and the focus went away from Sunday school and discipleship training to the Sunday morning service. We begin at 10:10 but are always done by noontime.

Because we have Sunday school after church, it forces us to end on time. This angers some people and blesses others.

I think we have given up too much: we've lost the altar and we've lost the discipleship training. Sunday school was discipleship training so where are we making that up?

APPENDIX C

RECORDED INTERVIEW WITH REV. MICHAEL WILES OF NEXT STEP INC. DECEMBER 1, 2009

The purpose of my paper is to find out what is working in the church world in New England. Can you please tell me where you are from?

Michael Wiles is a minister of the Assemblies of God and U.S. missionary working in the church health arena. My background is pastor and counselor so I'm interested in working at church growth issues and church structures and to partner with churches and church leadership to try to help them to be more effective in what they do.

Where exactly are you from?

I was born and raised in Oklahoma and spent most of my ministry life in Connecticut in the 1980s and back in Oklahoma in the 1990s and from their back in Connecticut these last four years.

That's interesting because you're from the Midwest and you minister here. What would you say if you were talking to one of your Midwestern friends who was considering coming to New England for ministry? They come to you for advice.

I primarily work here, but I stay connected throughout the nation and one of the things I find is that people are people. Things have changed quite a bit since the '80s in New England. There was a real strong New England attitude that can be standoffish. If you move more toward Boston you'll find a real bluntness. They'll have a reputation for being not as friendly as other parts of the country. Back in the '80s I saw a little more of that, but this time back out, that has softened dramatically. I think one of the reasons, is that we've had such an influx of other cultures in New England with different countries moving in. It's an entrance point into United States. I think that has a lot to do with softening that typical harsh mentality that sometimes is here.

But with all the new stuff in researching what we have done on what attracts people to the gospel, it doesn't matter if you're from New England or Nebraska or Oklahoma. I hear the same things: people are concerned about relationships. If you approach ministry in New England with a firm relationship aspect, bringing the

gospel helping to meet the needs of people, I think that you get a line just as well here as anywhere.

Are you optimistic right now about New England?

It's a yes and no. "Yes" because there 5% of Assemblies of God churches are growing at a fairly rapid rate. So, New England is more open to the gospel and the churches that are reaching out seem to have some success. The reason I say "no" is that there are so many that are not. Some seem to be locked into the mentality that we live in a post-Christian society and that New England is a tough area. There seems to be a lot of trepidation about spreading the gospel and reaching their community because of those attitudes and beliefs. If we can get past that and the church grows in preaching the Word of God and giving altar calls and training their people to invite people into their service we'll have success.

Your brother and nephew are pastors of a very large church in our area (Crossroads Cathedral, East Hartford, CT). What has that taught you for the rest of New England because it's such a large church?

Yes because my brother and nephew are there, I kind of use that as a laboratory. What are they doing that others can do? They would be the first to say they are struggling as much as everybody else. They would never say they have all the answers in everything. Recently I listened to something my brother was teaching on the secret to his growth: it was the miracle of salvation. Whenever somebody gets saved, they are excited about it so they tend to invite other people, particularly if it's been pretty dramatic, so God really transforms their life. You'll see another seven or eight people who do not know God visit the church because of them. After a while that runs off, and you won't see them as much, but if you can keep people continually saved at the altar, it yields a continual influx of people coming to the church. They give an altar call at every service and there are always multiple people there who don't know God because the people have bought them. God will do His part.

So it's almost like a snowball effect?

Absolutely!

But obviously you're going to churches that are a whole lot smaller, and they don't have the resources and staff as your brother's church does. So do you find that a difficult transition in your work?

I really don't. I was on staff with them when they were only 125 people; I came within the first year after he got here. One of the beliefs I have to get over to people is that every church wants to go from 150 to 500 immediately. If you look at Crossroad's growth, it is about 7% average over the years. Now they are 1600-1800 people on a Sunday. In a church of one hundred you are going to lose about 5% by

people moving, dying or other kind of stuff, so you need to bring in about 10% to 12% growth in a year to still end up with growth. That's only 12 people a year: that's two families. What am I going to do to win two people to Christ this year? So that's a manageable number.

How long has your brother pastored at his church?

He's going on 30 years.

One thing I like about you, as a consultant, you don't seem to get your feelings hurt when the church doesn't go the way you think it should.

My basic belief is the pastor is called of God. It's never my spot to come in to take over. The thing that frustrates me about pastors is the ones who have obviously already given up. They won't try anything new anymore and there's a real sense that it's hopeless. That makes me think more negative of me than of them. I have failed to motivate and get them to see the possibilities.

Can you discuss with me the role of a pastor? How important is the pastor with what you try to do with church leaders?

To me the pastor is the person in charge and so I think everything rises and falls with the leaders and so the role of the pastor is to take what God has placed within him [or her] and cast that vision to the people and lead forward.

Are people buying into the pastors' visions?

I think if the people don't buy into the pastor's vision, there will always be problems.

Don't we obviously have different styles of leadership? Some are very authoritative while others work well in teams.

To me it has nothing to do with their style of leadership. The pastor has got to have a clear vision from God and he [or she] has to present that to the people. Let's go to the DISC assessment that I know you're familiar with. If I am a very high D. person, that will look more like, "Follow me"; if I'm more of an S. person, it's "Okay, we need to get together." The way they present leadership may be in different ways, but still they have to have that vision which says, "Here's where we're heading."

That's a slow process. Let me go back to Crossroads. If they preach a message consistently, it is to take what God has done for you and take it into your world. If you go out of minister you can impact your world. That message is constantly given. Their theme is "It's all for souls." Multiple times a year and through many sermons, the pastor teaches the people that the heart of God is to reach souls and you play a part in it.

Do you think it's possible for a church to try to do too much at once?

They have one focus: it's all for souls. Of course there are a lot of branches but, small churches often do too much when they're really small and they want to have every function of the large church. They think: we need to have Sunday school, a youth group, cell groups but when you're a church of 50, who ends up doing all that but the pastor and his wife and his family? I think we do too much in the start. We should start adding as God brings in workers, as God brings them those who have a vision. When someone wants to come into my brother's church and wants someone else to begin a ministry, he says: "Sounds like a great idea, maybe you're the one." There is a principle that says if you look at everybody in a church that is in charge of people, every leader that really has a ministry, attracts about eight people to them. If you count how many people are actually involved in a leadership position in the church and multiply it times eight that's how many people you have. It started with the military; that one person naturally attracts about eight people. In my brother's church it comes out almost exactly to eight people.

Let's talk about the service itself. Do you ever feel that Pentecostal experience and manifestations can get in the way?

No. Let me qualify that. I think there are some things that happen in our churches that are not orderly. Usually, the Bible teaches order. There are times we allow things to happen that may not be biblical and we need to step it up and shut it down. I'm Pentecostal and I believe in that, but there are some churches that allow things to go on that we are embarrassed about. We have asked people in our ministry why don't you invite people to church and some have said: "I'm embarrassed of what goes on here."

That is scary. What did he do to change that?

It rises and falls with leadership. At times, the leader has to take that stand and take control of the service and call people down for it. I heard of a pastor who had somebody in his church that spoke in tongues every week but there was never an interpretation. The pastor sat down with the individual and showed him the Scripture. He told him that whenever he gave a message in tongues, he'd better be prepared to give the interpretation. He told him, "Because after some time if nobody does, I'm going to call on you." Sometimes you have to biblically, in love, take control, it's not that that person was trying to be bad, they were just maybe a little overenthusiastic.

What about Nelson Searcy? I like him and his stuff, and he reminds me of the way you think systematically. A lot of our guys are buying into it, but he is not a Pentecostal, how do we reconcile that?

I definitely don't think they are mutually exclusive. Being Pentecostal doesn't mean we don't plan and have systems. God can intervene in my system at any point but for some reason we think since we are Pentecostal God has to lead us by the seat of our pants. I hear a lot about guys like Bill Hybels who plan their services a year in advance and people say "That can't be spiritual," and then others tell me that God can only tell someone what needs to be preached on Sunday or on Wednesday or the week before? Can't He tell you that earlier?

What about the length of the service? If you listen to Nelson, he has a very brief service, but a lot of our Pentecostal churches go on longer.

To me, we have to look at the area. If I'm in Oklahoma, lengthier services many times are not a problem. But I look at the culture out here and sometimes they are. It's the culture we need to look at. If my service is so lengthy that visitors are going to check out... what's it all about? It's about souls.

If Sunday morning is when people are inviting people, maybe Wednesday night can be longer. It's the missionary mindset I have to shift into: What is the culture? Sometimes we believe that longer is more spiritual. Look at people and the way we are wired. We are wired for about an hour and a half to two hours. Even a movie today—I won't even go to a movie that is three hours long, I don't care how good it is. I don't go to them. There is a breaking point at the service the same way. The sermon should be 45 minutes. That's all people can handle.

What do you say to churches that have been to the revivals and now they boast that their church services get out hours after they begin?

Is that still going on? Is it going to be lasting? How many people were already Christians? A very high percentage were Christians coming into that.

Do you have a crazy vision for New England?

My vision is I would like every church to be a growing church. If you look at Southern New England we grew in a 10-year period by about 2000 people but if you take out the top 5% of churches we lost 1,100 people. Every church a growing church; every church preaching to their community. In our district, only 10% of churches showed any kind of growth and all the other 90% plateaued or had negative growth.

What about the longevity of the pastor?

It takes 3 to 4 to 5 years before the church really has faith to follow that pastor. Things don't happen until 3 to 5 years. I think in most situations God calls someone to be thinking longer than two years.

What about pastors who stay for years? Is that healthy?

Yes and no: it's healthy for a pastor to belong, but sometimes if a pastor has been around for 15 years and has this culture that is the opposite of growth it's so hard to turn around with that existing leader. There are almost no churches that have been stagnant at 100 for multiple years and with that existing leader, turned things around.

What do you see in the New England culture, not the church, that gives you hope?

I think historically bad times are good for the church if the church will buy into that. There are people who are hurting so it gives you a lot of open doors for ministry.

Anything negative?

I love this area. If there is a negative, it is not just New England; almost every area can talk too much about a post-Christian society, or say a hard New England society, so we minister very negatively. Nebraska says the same thing. Every area has its hard places.

What do you see about the pastor's family in reference to the health of the church.

I'm seeing a move which I think is healthy, particularly among the younger guys, some of it comes out of Andy Stanley; if I could change anything, when my daughters were young, I remember so little of their early years. I was so tied into the church and ministry that I neglected them. I think there is a move toward a balance of ministry and home. I think that's a positive.

APPENDIX D

RECORDED INTERVIEW WITH MARIOS ELINAS,
PASTOR OF VALLEY SHORE ASSEMBLY OF GOD
OLD SAYBROOK, CONNECTICUT
NOVEMBER 17, 2009

I'm trying to discover the unique characteristics of the church especially for New England. What would you say if you are talking to a friend from another part of the country who was considering coming to New England to do ministry? What would you say?

It's good soil.

Now tell me why.

There are some old good roots of God and the move of God, of revival and a lot of great things that we are walking in now, it passionately started in New England. The Great Awakenings, there are some really good root systems, some still very much alive. There are some stirrings in New England across denominations that make me very confident that this is good soil.

How do you answer people who say, "Oh, it's New England; it's so dead here?"

I would ask them, "How long have you ministered in New England?" Basically, I disagree with that, but I would not rebuke them, I would counter them with questions to show them that their position is not accurate.

Can you tell us a little of your history; I know you're not native to America.

I grew up on the island of Cyprus. I served in the Special Forces in the military in Cyprus, and after I got out of the Special Forces I came to New Jersey to go to college. I did four years, and my plan was to do graduate school and then to go back to Cyprus. I was in Trenton State College, and I gave my heart to Jesus in my first year in college. My pastor took me under his wings and disciplined me; I looked for another church like the one New Jersey in Connecticut to do graduate work in history and I found an Assembly of God Church in Willimantic, Connecticut. I was involved there and, within a year, I was on staff. I started to see the call of God on my life to preach the gospel and I was disciplined by my pastor. So after 10 years of serving him and for 11 years of teaching in the Christian school, God called me to

take a church in Old Saybrook, Connecticut. That's how I ended up with the assignment I now have.

When you went to Old Saybrook, it had some issues. Can you walk me through what happened? I know you've had a move of the Spirit.

The church was in need of revitalization. There were some really good foundations there of love, of people loving one another, of people loving God and the leaders who went before me who were really good people who loved people and loved God and did the best they could with what they were doing. However, the church had not grown and actually dwindled in numbers. The previous pastor had some personal issues that took a lot of his time. So, when we got there, the church was in great need for revitalization—revitalizing of the way the building looked, because in a community like Old Saybrook, an affluent community, the building did not look welcoming to people in that community. Then we had to do some revitalization of the people; there were about 20 people when we got there. The finances were not there, we left a substantial income to go there for a very small amount of money each week.

What turned the corner then?

I basically applied everything I had learned in my former assignment and a lot of things I learned from my pastor and my mentors to try to build a church and had a very relational ministry. I loved my people, I wrote letters, I visited, I did all the things you want to do to get the church to grow. They grew to about 80 people within a year. The finances were better than ever, with several thousand dollars in the bank; a lot of people were coming, and there was excitement. Within one year we were able to start paving the parking lot, which was really significant because the dirt parking lot in an affluent community was not appealing to these people. They did not want to park in the mud to get into the building.

I know something else happened

When I got to that point of 80 people within a year I got really frustrated because I felt like I couldn't take this church any further. I felt like this is as far as I can take and all that I can do. This is the feeling that I had and I felt I could not pastor more than 80 people. So I started to ask God what I should do and he brought me back to an encounter I had with him, a series of encounters, some of the things I experienced when I went to Brownsville. It was in that revival in 1997. The Lord spoke to me "You need to stir up the gift of God that is within you." I didn't understand what that meant. He showed me that I started to be afraid to talk about the Holy Spirit and to talk about Pentecost and the baptism in the Spirit. I had not even spoken in tongues for over a year. I didn't even mention the words holy and spirit in the same sentence. It was out of fear that if I did that the people in that community, who were intellectual and affluent would get scared. So I was basically pastoring and appealing to a certain mindset. But when I hit that brick wall the Lord showed me that I had to

stir up the fires within me. I decided to lay it all down and to preach about the Holy Spirit and started to bring about the Holy Spirit in the church.

Didn't you once tell me you were thinking of leaving? Were you serious enough to talk to your wife about it?

We both said we can't do this. We can't just keep doing this. We were in Cyprus on vacation in 2006. A year after I began pastoring the church that's when the Lord spoke to me. I came back from Cyprus and Danielle stayed on at Cyprus for three more weeks. I woke up in the middle of the night and the Lord told me that I will never preach an old sermon again. I was preaching stuff I had preached in the old church, the Willimantic church. It was just kind of carrying me. He said you will always preach new things, and I started from that day preaching from my heart—getting new revelation each week from the Word and it changed everything. Just a bunch of things lined up. When the Lord started moving, the people that I was previously afraid would be out of here, made appointments to come and see me. I braced for the worst, yet each one said they had been waiting 15, 20 years for this and told me they were behind me. They asked me: "Are you really going to go for it this time? We can't keep following a dangling carrot. Are you really going to go for revival? That's what we've been living for." They were living under the radar. They were secret and it's amazing how they came out of the woodwork.

So you were totally wrong about these people? The people you thought were your enemies turn out to be your best supporters.

They were passionate about things of the Spirit, they were just being polite, recognizing there was a grace on my life, but they were just sitting there bidding their time.

Did you have any kind of fallout?

No, not at that time. When we started to move in the Spirit everyone was excited. The Lord came and when He comes, His presence comes and changes people. You see people getting healed, people getting touched, salvations, people were getting filled with the Spirit, so there was life. Nobody resists that. We started our Friday night revivals once a month, the people were so hungry and passionate. People would come out so I could kind of preserve a little more traditional setting than I had brought the church up to at that time. Friday nights were really crazy, really radical. Different leaders from different places came and God started to orchestrate these connections. Each one was a divine connection with people who were just carrying something by way of the Spirit and in the realms of the supernatural they were just amazing, amazing services for a couple years.

There has been a fallout since then. There has been many. Our mission has defined us to be a church of power and glory and there have been many who have decided this is not for me and either honorably or dishonorably has said no.

Has that hurt you? Did it hurt you emotionally?

I think any pastor who says he's not hurt when people leave, especially on bad terms he is not being truthful. But I live with a sense of destiny. I know what I'm called to do: I keep my eyes on the Lord and the assignment He is given me and that's what allows me to bounce back and not become bitter or resentful. For every person who leaves, four people come. For every tithe dollar that leaves, honorably or not, God will bring in more dollars through the next person who comes. He is just orchestrating it. As long as I get out of the way and don't keep thinking it's my church.

When I first got here, I kept saying "This is not my church," but when the church grew to almost 200 people it was harder for me not to say: "This is my church." I'm going to be really honest. I started to think I had something to do with it. I came to this point when I had to realize that anytime I wanted to think it was my church I could have run it. But now, it's way beyond—there are deeper waters than I could ever swim in. This is the time to actually say "This is not my church," but pride can come in if we are not careful and we could think we had something to do with it. Then we think we have arrived and we can "Take it from here Jesus." That's the point where we start to decline.

Are you optimistic in New England as far as the churches?

In term of relationships?

No, I know you are optimistic about your own church, but what about other churches? Do you think things are happening in New England?

So much is happening, especially in Connecticut. There are many fires in Connecticut.

Can you elaborate a little more?

We have now worked with a lot of different churches, some within our own Fellowship, some outside, who are experiencing life, renewal, refreshing times, transformation and power through the resurrection of Jesus. People are getting touched by God; people are getting hungry for God. There are nine churches I can count real quick off the top of my head that I have relationships with. God is really moving and people getting saved every week and people are seeing transformations in their relationships and even in the dark economy, seeing resources beyond what they had before, just amazing breakthroughs.

What do you see as the challenges ahead for church leaders?

I think the challenges...there is no new thing under the sun. That's part of it and the challenge is for leaders in the church, some are going to be targets, and we touched

on this before but when people leave they are going to feel rejection, if they let it. If we put it in a negative light, we can get bitter, we can have wounds and become guarded instead of open and love people. We have not had much training about having success. What do we do when people come flooding toward doors and driving from all around? How can we deal with them without getting puffed up? Another challenge is really significant for this area. New England is small compared to the larger states but there is a tendency to try to isolate and keep our piece of the pie and hoard it and try to maintain; but if we have that mindset we do it at the expense of not advancing as a team of leaders moving forward for the glory of God and the advancing of the kingdom. The challenge is going to be for us to network together and to forget our differences. I'm in relationship with people I don't even know what they believe, I just know they love Jesus and they preach the Word. Of course I'm not going to be with Muslims and Buddhists, I'm talking about Bible-believing churches that lift up the name of Jesus. But we don't need to worry about what they believe about the end times or even the baptism. I don't know if they're considered Spirit-filled or not Spirit-filled, I just know they love Jesus and I have relationship with them and we do things together.

So it's majoring on the majors and minoring on the minors, right?

It's majoring on the major period.

It's so easy to pick apart someone's doctrine

Those things divide and Jesus said, "He who doesn't draw, scatters." It's not to divide; it's about gathering. If we have the need to be right, we are going to get into these issues that divide.

As a leader, what do you feel is your top priority in your day-to-day life as a minister?

The most significant aspect of everything I do is my relationship with God. It might sound cliché-ish, but I tenaciously guard that relationship and nurture it because everything flows out of that. Having an internal government of self-discipline to connect with God, out of a place of love and a place of rest and not driven-ness, not out of obligation or requirement, just because I want to connect with God. So, for me, the time that I have with Him to bask in His Word and to meditate and think on His promises, loving Him, talking with Him, worshiping, that's the most significant aspect of why I'm a leader

Can you walk me through what that means a little bit?

I have certain disciplines I have to follow and one of them is I have to run every day and during my time of running, I connect with God. I'm in the Spirit; I am worshiping Him, listening to music and focusing on what is being sung. It starts there. I have a literal quiet time, I don't say anything. I don't do anything in His

presence. I do pray for the needs but not as much as I used to, when I saw very few breakthroughs. Now I just get into that secret place of Matthew chapter 6, the Father is in the secret place, I just get into that realm, the secret place of the Most High God. Through that place I access the things of this world and the needs and they don't look as big. I come before Him in the place of relationship and closeness. I spend time in the Word; my time of study to preach is very minimal compared to what was. I don't spend that much time preparing to preach.

You are preparing yourself?

Yes, I prepare my heart. Every Sunday morning I spent two or three hours just wanting to be with God, not asking Him to bless the day, not asking Him to help the service, not asking Him to help me preach, I just want to be with Him. Out of that place, I get the revelation of what He's doing on that particular day. Of course, I have fed my heart, I've been thinking all week and I've been praying, too, but the weight comes off. It all depends on that time I had with him.

How do you do that? At your church or your house?

I have a few spots at my house. There is a place where I can go and spend time with the Lord. There is a place at the church, and there's a place in Old Saybrook where I park my car by the water and I just get alone with Him.

So you are the first person in the church Sunday morning?

No, I'm usually right on time or late. The enemy has crosshairs on the worship team and the leader to take us out before we have to minister. People who are well meaning, but misinformed become vehicles of negativity and they can bring up something that jolts us out of that place of resting in the Lord when we are ready to deliver what He put on our hearts. I developed these firewalls around me and the same with the worship team. Once they do their sound check, they go to the office. They lock themselves up and don't talk to anyone and people have come to understand that. I avoid the jam of people, I'm very mindful, I wanted to be God-conscious so I can minister.

A lot of time the old-time Pentecostals had that same attitude, where the pastor was not assessable, where you could not near the pastor before the service.

Yes, I want you to know I'm approachable and accessible and will talk to people and love on people, because I love them, and some of them I only see once a week so I have that desire so I mingle with people, but if I sense something is going in the wrong direction, I make sure I avoid any traps or landmines, any negativity about anything. I avoid it immediately and sometimes I speak directly to it, but I'm very mindful of those crosshairs. So should anyone who ministers, to take them out.

How about your leadership? Do you spend a lot of time developing leaders?

Yes, that's the priority of my time. Then there's the time with God, then there's the time with my family. No amount of success in the ministry can make up for a family. If something is going to give, it will come from the ministry. Everyone knows we're not as far as we could be because I choose to put my family first. The third one is leadership. So I spent a lot of time with leaders: I spend time in weekly staff meetings, monthly extended meetings and then I have 12 guys, who have leadership potential that I am mentoring.

When you say your family comes first, what does that look like?

I don't put the church before my family and I don't put my ministry before the family; my family is my ministry. What it looks like? It's having quality time with every member of my family—every day—whether it's five minutes throwing the ball around with one of my boys or jumping on them before they go to bed. Somehow, I'm going to connect with them on a heart level. I'll ask, "What is the Word showing you? What is the Lord teaching you? What are you feeling?" It's quality time, connecting with the members of my family

Does the church understand this? Do you preach about this?

I preached a series about family, out of Genesis 24 of Rebecca and Isaac and God gave me a revelation about the importance of family. Everything comes out of family, a declaration that releases people deeper into their destiny. Blessing should come from the family, encouragement, training. All these things stem from, of course, the family. All those things He wants to build in people should be foundational in people's lives. I'm really convinced about it and I preached about it and people understand my commitment to my family. My wife and I sometimes tag-team preach, or sometimes she preaches. She's very involved in my ministry and I honor her and I respect her calling and anointing. They know I'm going to put the family over the church. I made it very clear.

So it sounds like relationships is the main thing for you?

It's God, family, leaders. Everything in the life of Jesus, in terms of building His ministry, was relational. He was relational on every level, in the letters of Paul, and in our core values, which basically governs our culture, everything points back to healthy relationships.

What are your challenges ahead?

We constantly position ourselves, I refuse to try to maintain. We had yesterday and even though I'm grateful for it, as a leader, I'm constantly putting another mountain in front of people. If God doesn't move, we are dead meat; I'm constantly dealing with things, which are huge challenges. We recently embarked on something that if

God didn't come through, we had a chance to lose everything we built for. We have a building project that we have to deal with the city and zoning. Beyond that, I'm imprisoned by a dream that is impossible in the natural.

You have two services in the morning and you have talked that sometimes your services are lengthy.

We have an understanding which I communicated very carefully when things were really gelling that the early service has a time restriction that we can't do anything about. It will always end at 10:30. (It starts at 8:30 a.m.). It runs for an hour and a quarter or twenty minutes. The second service starts at 10:30 and there is the understanding that at one o'clock, if the service is still going on, the children's workers will release the children. We have a whole system and protocol of how they are released to their parents; sometimes our services go past one and last week we ended at 3:30 p.m. Everybody understands there is no judgment if someone has to leave. There is no condemnation, and they will leave with respect and not with an attitude like the service went too long. There's freedom, but there is also clear communication about how we are operating.

Does the first crowd feel like they are in the same church as the second crowd?

That's some of the homework we have to cut out for ourselves. We have events and activities that bring both parties together. We do monthly picnics and hold other fellowships. We have home groups that contain some people from both groups to foster unity and cooperation and friendship. Because the two personalities are so different, there tends to be a division sometimes.

Do you have Sunday nights?

No, and we don't have Friday night revivals anymore. We have a different setup in terms of meetings. Our youth meets on Wednesdays. On Wednesday nights, we don't meet every week but have times of focus weeks.

Why did you get rid of Sunday nights? Did you think it was counterproductive?

We never had Sunday nights. Old Saybrook is a beach community so in the spring all the way through early fall, people are all boating on the water. The attendance was poor. I'm still believing for Sunday nights when the Spirit moves.

APPENDIX E

RECORDED INTERVIEW WITH SCOTT SHEMETH PASTOR OF CHRISTIAN LIFE CHURCH KENSINGTON, CONNECTICUT DECEMBER 1, 2009

First tell me how long you have been in your church.

16 years.

Was the church a new church? Did you take over a church?

At that time the church was 46 years old. It had gone through 12 pastors and in six locations.

I understand it was a different size in those days than it is today.

They were at 60 and it was only at times they had that. I looked over the data for the past 46 years using the ACMR's through the 46 years. As the church attendance tried to climb, the pastor would leave and that attendance would drop back down. So I purpose not to leave.

So you then felt like leaving sometimes?

I love the church. I love what I'm doing and so it has not been an issue. I can't wait to get in here in the morning.

What is your attendance today?

I would say 200.

If you had a friend who was outside of New England and he or she was considering coming to minister in New England, what would be your advice?

I would point them to Charles Swindoll's biography. He tried to make it here and failed miserably.

So you would not be too encouraging then?

When I was in AGTS, I was heralding, “Go to New England...” because I feel like this area of the country is in great need. George Barna did a study years ago that in most of the country one out of 50 people are born again. Here in New England, it’s more like 1 out of 12. There are more Christians in China than in New England. So come to New England. There are 1.2 billion people in China and 120 million Christians, about 10%, but in New England, it’s closer to 1 or 2%.

Why are you optimistic about that is happening in New England?

I love the current leadership in the Assemblies of God. They have a vision for the lost and with Dr. Wood and Rev. Bob Wise and the different presbyters that I served with are all excellent men and in unity who want to move forward and are willing to take risks. They’re willing to change structural things. That’s important to me.

Is it just the leadership then? So, it’s all about leadership? That has come across in my research again and again. Is there anything frustrating you about the New England area?

It’s difficult when a person does finally receive Christ to maintain them in Christ. It seems to take more effort than you would expect.

You mean in other areas of the country?

I never pastored in another area of the country, but I was an evangelist throughout the world and that’s different because you just bringing people to Christ. It seems like if you’re bringing people to Christ up through water baptism, and I don’t count conversions until they are water baptized, they go on for a while nicely but if you don’t watch them, they go away; they lose that steam it seems like. Pastoring is a lot of work.

What turned the corner in your church when you went from 60 to 200?

Frankly, I expected to explode when I took the pastorate and we didn’t. One by one: it was hard work and we never just exploded into growth. It was always one by one and struggling but it was a good struggle and a good fight. Sixteen years is a long time and one by one as the church got bigger I started to put more effort into maintaining people who were there. Otherwise they would fade away. The growth slowed and so initially I saw a very good growth quickly, but then we stopped growing and I knew I needed a building and as soon as I added the building it started to swing upward again. Now we are looking to build again. We’ve been in a steady 200 mark for some time and I am adding staff and adding a building and all those kinds of things.

So it wasn't like you had an influx of people?

No, it was a fight all along the way.

A couple of questions about your leadership style: I know you're a very strong person. Would you qualify yourself as a strong leader, a dominating leader? How would you qualify yourself?

I micromanage until competency. I bring someone on to lead; I look over their shoulder and lead them and I correct them and so forth until I really believe they can do it comfortably. Then I release them to make their own mistakes and then I back them.

How about with your church board?

Christ is the head of the church and manifested in the senior pastor. So I lead the church, the board's function is basically if I whack out, weird out or blitz out they are the front line for the membership to call me on it. Other than that, I run and make decisions, they don't lead the church. They are businessmen who are not called to lead the church.

The under shepherd leads the church and they support my leadership. And they help balance me a bit. They served me by influencing me and if push comes to shove, if I make a mistake, they can vote me down, but I've never had a problem with my board whatsoever.

As a Pentecostal church, do you find that new people have a problem with Pentecostal manifestations? Does that help your church or slow your church?

We have had an influx of people from fundamentalist background. Their background is that speaking in tongues is from the devil, but they saw life here and integrity and that became more important to them. So they are opened to the Holy Spirit, and in some cases some of them were baptized in the Holy Spirit but some are still blocked because of their doctrine and upbringing. In this church we would allow people to become members who are not Spirit-filled, but we are not really interested in them being on the board.

Implying they might get on the board if they were sharp or something?

I guess they could, but I'm concerned that we would lose our way a little bit in that area if that would start to happen.

What about the length of your service? Some pastors say we need to have longer services, others say they are too long.

We run multiple services and it takes care of itself because you can only go so long before you are jamming up the next service. I feel like people enjoy the first service although it's not as well attended. It runs an hour and a quarter and the second

service which does go longer, sometimes much longer, other times not quite as long. After the second service we serve a meal every Sunday to the people. Church is not just coming together for the singing and preaching and the altar time, it's also the fellowship. It's kind of ongoing until the afternoon. People sit and stay quite a long time. They sit around circular tables to have a meal every Sunday in different families. It gets very full.

Where does the food come from?

People pay for it. We have a chef who comes and prepares beautiful meals for the people. It's like a restaurant. But it's very inexpensive and so single mothers love it. Moms who normally go home from the Sunday morning service to cook and clean, to them it's not really a Sabbath, so we let them pay a little bit and they can sit and receive a great meal.

Is it a pretty deluxe meal?

At times it can be, while at other times we serve pasta and meatballs. For the most part, it's roast pork with gravy and mashed potatoes. It's a good meal.

Where do you do the cooking?

We have a kitchen in the church.

So is the chef paid?

No, he's a deacon; He's a fellowship person. That's why he does it; he loves doing it at the church. He does the preparation and he had purposed in his heart not to turn away.

What would you say is the percentage of people who stay for the meal?

Because we have two services some people actually come back from the first service for the meal but mostly it's the second service people. I would say at least half, every week. Sometimes we put them in every room we can put them in.

Do you have a Sunday school?

This last September I did a major reconstruction because we were struggling with lack of growth and I think what I'm finding, we have been hung up on the two hundred mark for some time. I'm going to build soon—that will solve one problem, but I feel like at that level it's hard to do a graded program for boys and girls in Sunday morning for Sunday school. It's difficult to have people who love children and are capable of it. Many do it out of guilt or are doing it because they want to be a good Christian, but they're not competent. Then they don't do a good job and many times don't want to do it anyway.

So I cut nine classes from last September and those were our teenage Missionettes and Royal Ranger classes. I stopped our Children's Sunday school on Sunday morning and put together something we call: "Power Play." Instead of small groups we have a large group and it's working out beautifully.

I have an older couple in the church who have a lot of children. They serve the Lord working as children pastors. They are grandpa and grandma to these kids. A lot of children don't have grandparents because the society is so transient, that they call them grandpa and grandma. I didn't tell them to do that, they just defaulted to that, because grandma and grandpa get on their hands and knees and they play games with the kids. Every month there is a different game. The kids are involved, and not just listening to a teacher. We do that during the first service.

Our Royal Rangers and Missionettes are our small group discipleship for children and we put a lot more effort into that. We don't have small groups for adults or a typical Wednesday night service. We have a senior high teen class, that's where the teens get their small groups. On Wednesday night they have their own worship service.

On Sunday morning, we have Sunday school for adults and we do table talk groups, during the first service. On Wednesday night we do table talk groups in the sanctuary. We do a little worship, a little teachings, and we have table leaders with small group leaders leading the discussion. I have found that small groups are very difficult to run in New England.

What about Sunday night?

Nothing. I had Sunday nights for years and I dragged them back here, one of the best things we ever did was stopped Sunday nights. It wore us out. We don't leave here till 5 o'clock on Sunday, anyway.

About your family life, any changes in the way you treat your family over the years?

It's always a moving target and when you finally get one down, another baby comes along. Two months ago, my 16-year-old twins both got their learners permits. I am focused and conscious of staying strong in building relationship with my children. When my daughter got her learner's permit, I take her out driving and feel like the Lord has used that. Any time I get something that would bond us, I really carve out that time, and my teenagers have given me no trouble at all.

We do our devotions each morning. I have them come down to the living room. They do their chores, I read them the Scripture and we kneel together, we pray and sing a song and that's the way we do it.

APPENDIX F

QUESTIONS FOR APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY SESSION

- 1) Think back to your first visit or first few visits. Tell us how you first were welcomed into this church. Why did you stay? Was there someone who helped you become part of the church?
- 2) Describe a time of fellowship when you felt happy and secure. Why did you feel good? Go into details; was there someone who helped you?
- 3) Describe a past event or ministry at Abundant Life that positively impacted you or your family's life. Why?
- 4) What do you value most about being a part of Abundant Life? Why?
- 5) Describe a past children's or youth event or program at Abundant Life that has positively affected you or your family?
- 6) Give an example (past) of what you value about the worship service.
- 7) Tell a time when either the preaching or teaching has changed or supported you? Can you be specific?
- 8) Tell us a time Abundant Life has been an emotional, physical, or spiritual support to you in hard times. If possible, be specific. What was it that made you feel supported?
- 9) Give an example or a feeling of how Abundant Life affects your normal daily life. Your family's life?

APPENDIX G

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO THE APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

- 1) Think back to your first visit or first few visits. Tell us how you first were welcomed into this church. Why did you stay? Was there someone who helped you become part of the church?**

People fondly remembered the smiles, handshakes, and the way certain people went out of their way to learn their name. The groups named certain leaders from the church who were especially welcoming: Madeleine Ojeda, Elijah Ojeda, Pastor Brown and Pastor Ellis. They remembered the welcome cards and the follow-up phone calls. They were touched with the sense that the congregation generally wanted the Holy Spirit and noticed the congregation was eager to listen to the messages from the pastor. People pointed out how happy their children were and expressed their eagerness to find a church that preaches the Bible and was kid-friendly. Some expressed how quickly they felt at home. Many have said they were praying for a church.

- 2) Describe a time of fellowship when you felt happy and secure. Why did you feel good? Go into details; was there someone who helped you?**

The adult Sunday school class is a place of warmth and fellowship. The teachers of the adult classes are natural teachers and the students are open and eager to learn. Others mentioned the church's Vacation Bible Camp, held each summer; this came up again and again in the session. Naturally, the topic of fellowship along with the dinners and food often came up in responses. People mentioned the church picnics, the visitor dinners, the snack times and when the pastor took new people out to lunch. They pointed out how key the small group ministry is to fellowship. Others expressed the church's freedom in worship and the honesty in teaching and preaching and how that helps people feel secure.

- 3) Describe a past event or ministry at Abundant Life that positively impacted you or your family's life. Why?**

The people mentioned several ministries that positively impacted their lives: Women's Ministries, the Youth Group, the worship team, along with some special events such as Heroes Unmasked, our Halloween alternative, and the paintball field. Others gladly recounted of the work sessions when, for instances, we put together the baptistery and completed the new building.

4) What do you value most about being a part of Abundant Life? Why?

The church has a newcomer's luncheon and many expressed an appreciation for these times of getting to know people. They remembered the prayer times and when the pastor preached through a book of the Bible and still others remembered Financial Peace University when they were going through financial hard times. Still others remembered the open arms and the non-judgmental attitude of the church. They spoke of the encouragement, of how the church rallies around those in need. A few of the respondents counted a favorite guest evangelist or missionary that fed them spiritually.

5) Describe a past children's or youth event or program at Abundant Life that has positively affected you or your family?

People expressed their happiness with both the children and youth programs. They happily recounted the way church ministers to children at their own age level. The people remembered the past children's' activities: the Live Nativity on the Town Green, the Youth Convention and, of course, the Vacation Bible Camp.

6) Give an example (past) of what you value about the worship service.

By and large, everyone enjoys the freedom to worship the Lord. The people love testimonies, having the children in the service, the altar time and when sermons are not overly harsh. The people trust the worship leaders to lead by the Spirit. They enjoy a certain amount of humor in the pulpit. One person even expressed how much he enjoyed standing as a congregation when the Scripture is read for the sermon.

7) Tell a time when either the preaching or teaching has changed or supported you? Can you be specific?

The people reported how they are enriched by creative messages, such as the special dramas during the sermon. The groups expressed that they like "high accountability" preaching on tithing, family, church and the church family worldwide. Others expressed an appreciation for the sermons that guest speakers have delivered on Sunday evening and how they were able to apply them to their everyday life. People expressed how they like the music that speaks to the heart. Church attendees love preaching on prayer, forgiveness, how it is better to give than to receive, and what we can do for God.

8) Tell us a time Abundant Life has been an emotional, physical or spiritual support to you in hard times. If possible, be specific. What was it that made you feel supported?

Some people recounted how the church supported them in times of crises. They fondly remembered the power of the small groups, how the church cared for a spouse whose husband was deployed in the military. Many comments spoke of feeling

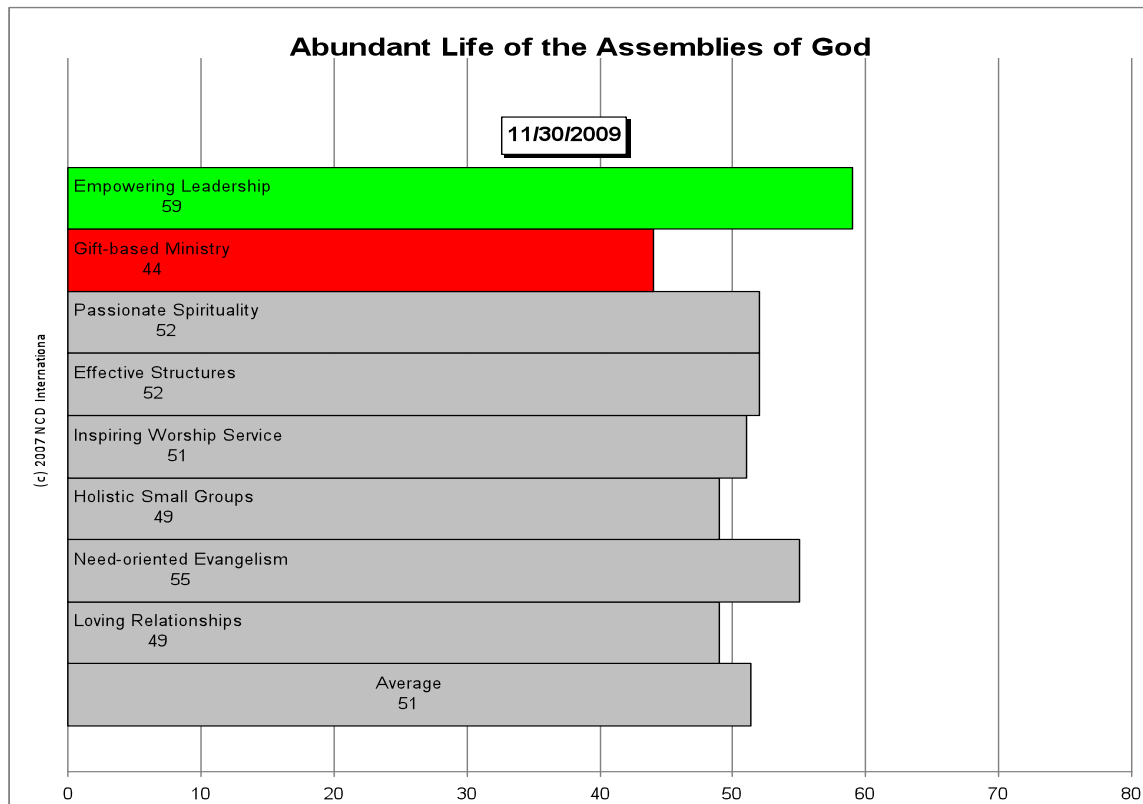
supported when the church prayed for them. One person even mentioned the emotional support felt with the loss of a pet.

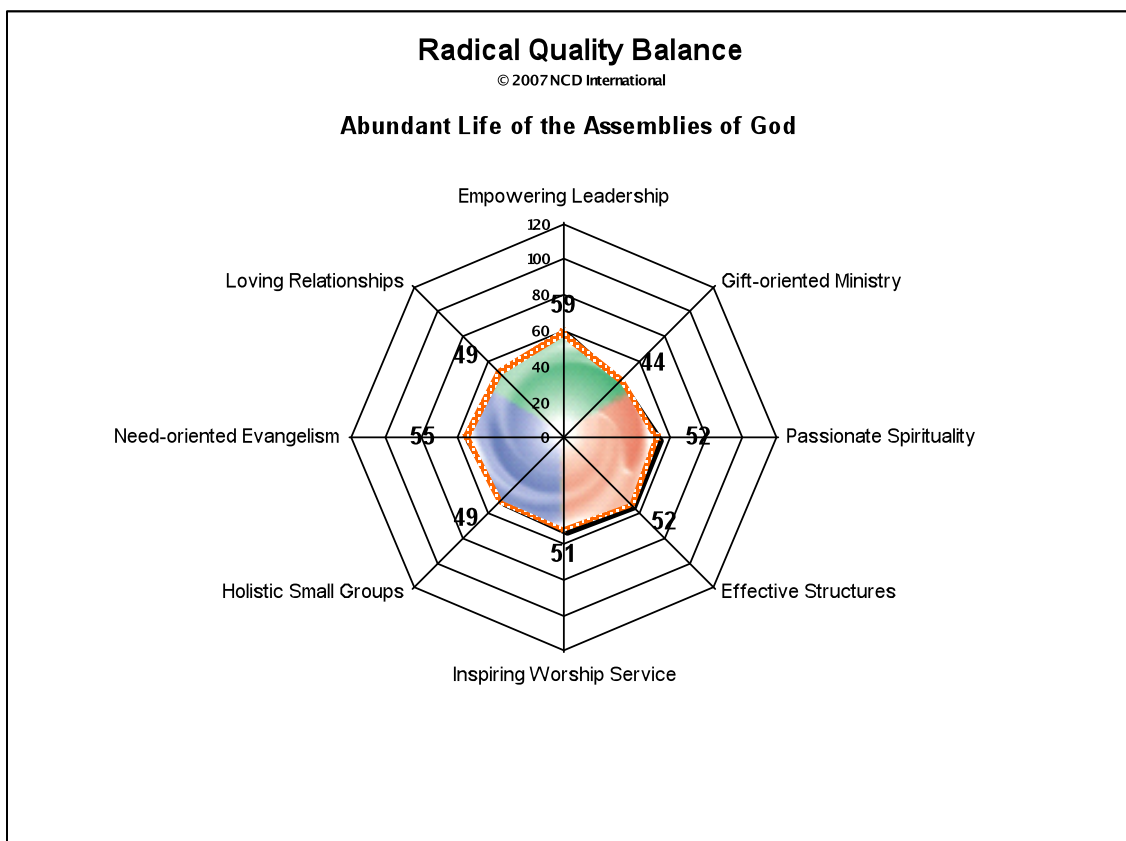
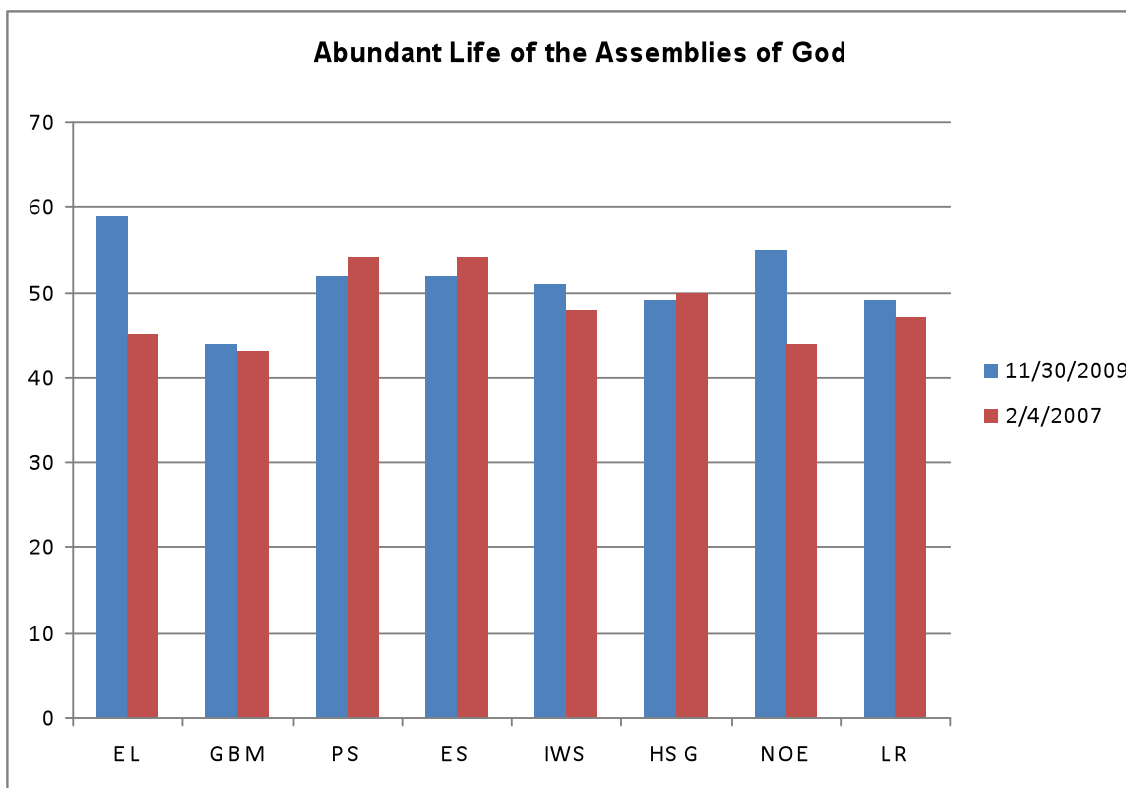
9) Give an example or a feeling of how Abundant Life affects your normal daily life. Your family's life?

Many of the comments expressed an appreciation over how Abundant Life reminds them to give thanks and praise; they have good memories of serving, and how members of their families now quote and use the Bible. They are reenergized.

APPENDIX H

NATURAL CHURCH DEVELOPMENT RESULTS





APPENDIX I

ABUNDANT LIFE CHURCH ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS NOVEMBER 29, 2009

1) How long have you been attending Abundant Life?

- Less than six months
- 6 months to 2 years
- 2 years to 5 years
- More than 5 years

2) What is your marital status?

- Single
- Married
- Divorced

3) If you are married, how would you rate your marriage?

- Very happy and fulfilling
- A Normal marriage
- Unhappy and unfulfilling
- The marriage is in trouble

4) How old are you?

- Teenager
- 20 to 30 years old
- 31 to 40 years old
- 41 years old or older

5) How would you describe the worship service at Abundant Life?

- Right balance of singing and preaching
- Sermons are too short and singing is too long
- Sermons are too long and singing is too short
- Both the sermon and singing are too short
- Both the sermon and singing are too long

6) How would you describe the sermons at Abundant Life?

- Just the right balance of Scripture and application
- Would like more in-depth Scripture explanation

- Would like more testimonies/stories

7) How would you describe the length of the sermons (currently 35 minutes)?

- Length of message is just right
- Want a shorter message
- Want a longer message

8) When there is an altar call do you feel...?

- There is enough time to linger and wait on God.
- There is not enough time to linger and wait on God.

9) When there is an altar call do you feel...?

- You are given the privacy you need.
- No one ever prays for you.
- Too many people pray for you.

10) How would you describe the singing part of the worship service?

- The music is the right balance of contemporary and older songs.
- The music is too contemporary.
- The music needs to be more contemporary.

11) How would you describe the length of time we dedicate to singing?

- Just the right amount of time.
- Not enough time
- Too much time

12) How would you describe the volume?

- Just right
- Too loud
- Too quiet

13) Our service time begins at 9:30 AM. Do you find this time

- Just the right time
- Too early in the morning
- Too late in the morning

14) If we created a Saturday night service to reach new people would you:

- Support it with your time
- Invite people to come
- Don't think it's a good idea

15) Are you involved in weekly small groups at the church?

- Yes, I attend almost every week
- Yes, I attend occasionally
- No, I am not involved in a small group

16) If you are not in a small group, is it because:

- You don't think you need it.
- You can't come out during the week.
- There is no child care.

17) Are you involved in weekly Sunday school at the church?

- Yes, I attend almost every week
- Yes, I attend occasionally
- No, I am not involved in Sunday school class

18) If you are not attending Sunday school, is it because:

- You don't think you need to
- The topics don't interest you
- Other

19) When do you prefer to have Sunday school

- After the church service (like today)
- Before the service

20) How much time do you pray in a week?

- Less than 30 minutes
- 30 minutes to one hour
- More than an hour

21) How much time do you spend reading the Bible each week?

- Less than 30 minutes
- 30 minutes to one hour
- More than an hour

22) How much time do you spend in prayer and Bible reading with your family each week?

- Less than 30 minutes
- 30 minutes to one hour
- More than an hour
- N/A

23) Do you struggle with sexual temptation like Internet pornography?

- No
- Yes

24) Do you watch movies with a rating other than G, PG or PG13?

- No
- Yes

25) Do you feel like you have a passion for the lost?

- Yes, it consumes me
- Yes, I really care for the lost
- Sometimes, Sometimes no
- No, I believe it will all work out in the end

APPENDIX J

ABUNDANT LIFE CHURCH ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS NOVEMBER 29, 2009

45 People took the survey, the number in parentheses represents how many people answered the questions, and the percentage is based on that number.

1. How long have you been attending Abundant Life? (45)

- | | |
|------------------------|----------|
| ▪ Less than six months | 5-11.1% |
| ▪ 6 months to 2 years | 7-15.5% |
| ▪ 2 years to 5 years | 10-22.2% |
| ▪ More than 5 years | 13-51.1% |

2. What is your marital status? (45)

- | | |
|------------|----------|
| ▪ Single | 10-22.2% |
| ▪ Married | 32-71.1% |
| ▪ Divorced | 3-6.6% |

3. If you are married, how would you rate your marriage? (32)

- | | |
|------------------------------|---------|
| ▪ Very happy and fulfilling | 21-65.6 |
| ▪ A Normal marriage | 9-28.1 |
| ▪ Unhappy and unfulfilling | 2-6.25 |
| ▪ The marriage is in trouble | 0-0% |

4. How old are you? (45)

- | | |
|-------------------------|----------|
| ▪ Teenager | 9-20% |
| ▪ 20 to 30 years old | 5-11.1% |
| ▪ 31 to 40 years old | 2-4.4% |
| ▪ 41 years old or older | 29-64.4% |

5. How would you describe the worship service at Abundant Life? (45)

- | | |
|---|----------|
| ▪ Right balance of singing and preaching | 31-68.8% |
| ▪ Sermons are too short and singing is too long | 6-13.3% |
| ▪ Sermons are too long and singing is too short | 3-6.6% |
| ▪ Both the sermon and singing are too short | 5-11.1% |
| ▪ Both the sermon and singing are too long | 0-0% |

6. How would you describe the sermons at Abundant Life? (43)

- | | |
|---|----------|
| ▪ Just the right balance of Scripture and application | 25-58.1% |
| ▪ Would like more in-depth Scripture explanation | 14-32.5% |

- Would like more testimonies/stories 4-9.3%
- 7. How would you describe the length of the sermons (currently 35 minutes)?(45)**
- Length of message is just right 33-73.3%
 - Want a shorter message 2-4.4%
 - Want a longer message 10-27.2%
- 8. When there is an altar call do you feel...? (43)**
- There is enough time to linger and wait on God. 26-60.4%
 - There is not enough time to linger and wait on God. 17-39.5%
- 9. When there is an altar call do you feel...? (41)**
- You are given the privacy you need. 34-89.9%
 - No one ever prays for you. 5-12.1%
 - Too many people pray for you. 2-4.87%
- 10. How would you describe the singing part of the worship service? (45)**
- The music is the right balance of contemporary and older songs. 33-64.4%
 - The music is too contemporary 7-15.5%
 - The music needs to be more contemporary 9-20%
- 11. How would you describe the length of time we dedicate to singing? (45)**
- Just the right amount of time 32-71.1%
 - Not enough time 11-24.4%
 - Too much time 2-4.4%
- 12. How would you describe the volume? (45)**
- Just right 37-82.2%
 - Too loud 2-4.4%
 - Too quiet 6-13.3%
- 13. Our service time begins at 9:30 AM. Do you find this time (43)**
- Just the right time 29-67.4%
 - Too early in the morning 13-30.2%
 - Too late in the morning 1-2.32%
- 14. If we created a Saturday night service to reach new people would you: (34)**
- Support it with your time 16-47.1%
 - Invite people to come 6-17.6%
 - Don't think it's a good idea 12-35.2%

15. Are you involved in weekly small group at the church? (43)

- Yes, I attend almost every week 17-39.5%
- Yes, I attend occasionally 8-18.6%
- No, I am not involved in a small group 18-41.8%

16. If you are not in a small group is it because: (17)

- You don't think you need it 1-5.86%
- You can't come out during the week 11-64.7%
- There is no child care 5-29.4%

17. Are you involved in weekly Sunday school at the church? (44)

- Yes, I attend almost every week 30-69.2%
- Yes, I attend occasionally 37-15.9%
- No, I am not involved in Sunday school class 7-15.9%

18. If you are not attending Sunday school is it because: (14)

- You don't think you need to 0
- The topics don't interest you 3-21.4%
- Other 11-78.5%

19. When do you prefer to have Sunday school (36)

- After the church service (like today) 25-69.4%
- Before the service 11-30.5%

20. How much time do you pray in a week? (42)

- Less than 30 minutes 14-31.1%
- 30 minutes to one hour 14-31.1%
- More than an hour 17-37.7%

21. How much time do you spend reading the Bible each week? (42)

- Less than 30 minutes 10-23.8%
- 30 minutes to one hour 16-38%
- More than an hour 16-38.1%

22. How much time do you spend in prayer and Bible reading with your family each week? (42)

- Less than 30 minutes 6-14.2%
- 30 minutes to one hour 2-4.7%
- More than an hour 24-57.1
- N/A 10-23.8%

23. Do you struggle with sexual temptation like Internet pornography? (44)

- No 36-81.8%
- Yes 8-18.1%

24. Do you watch movies with a rating other than G, PG or PG13? (43)

- | | |
|-------|----------|
| ▪ No | 20-46.5% |
| ▪ Yes | 23-53.5% |

25. Do you feel like you have a passion for the lost?

- | | |
|--|----------|
| ▪ Yes, it consumes me. | 2-4.6% |
| ▪ Yes, I really care for the lost. | 24-55.8% |
| ▪ Sometimes, Sometimes no. | 16-37.2 |
| ▪ No, I believe it will all work out in the end. | 1-2.3% |

APPENDIX K

SERMONS BASED ON RESEARCH ON THE CHURCH'S HEALTH

Date: November 15, 2009

Scripture: John 4:27-38

Topic: Our Church's Health

Introduction

When I began my preaching series through the book of Romans, I mentioned there would be times when I would take breaks, especially during the holiday seasons. We have completed 12 rather intensive messages and I feel it's time to take one of those breaks. For the next three weeks, I plan to preach a mini-series in regards to my nearly completed doctorate of Ministry's program. In case you didn't know, four years ago, I began this course of study and am currently working on the big project and hope to be completed by year's end. I won't graduate until May, but at least my portion will be completed.

My project (thesis) is specifically on the health and growth of Abundant Life. I believe that a healthy church is naturally a growing church. If we concentrate on health, we will grow. Have you ever heard of a child who refused to grow? It does happen. Recently we had a case in our own church. The purpose of a child is not to put on pounds, but it is a sign of health. Let's get healthy, let's grow!

Before I read the Scripture, I need your help. In two weeks, I will conclude this series. After church, during the Sunday school hour, I need to hold a strategy-forming session with you and an evaluation of our church. It is important research for my project. Don't look at it only for me; it's an important tool that will be given to the church leadership so we can better discern the health of this church and give them ideas of how this church will grow.

My messages normally take me 10-15-20 hours to prepare each week. In reality they take much more, because I spend all my waking hours considering them. This one has taken me four years!

A. Food?

In John 4 we have the famous story of Jesus talking to the Samaritan woman. Here's a woman who is at the well and for some reason ostracized by her family and friends. It is very uncharacteristic for a Jewish man to reach out to a Samaritan, much less a Samaritan *woman*. The Bible is very clear of how Jesus went out of His way to go through Samaria simply so He would meet this woman and bring her and her family to salvation. Personally, I have used this text in many sermons across the years, but I want to highlight what was said after she left.

In verse 27, the disciples returned and were surprised to see Him talking with a woman (a Samaritan woman) but no one had the guts to ask him what He wanted or why He was talking with her? They were more scandalized about the fact Jesus was talking to a woman, than that this woman was lost without a Savior. Sounds like the church.

The woman ran back to her village to tell people what happened there and the disciples urged Jesus to eat something. It's not that they were being Jewish mothers but, as disciples, it was their job to look out for the Master's health. Having visited the area, I can tell you it can get hot and the disciples were concerned about Jesus' physical welfare. He was probably exhausted.

He explained to them that the satisfaction of completing the work of the Father given to Him was greater than any food they might have to offer Him. In verse four when we get the word "had to" we get the idea that the Father had sent Him for this journey. I would not be surprised if during one of the Lord's Prayer times with God that He was told to do this. So He was not surprised to see this woman but instead went there simply to speak to her. Jesus said something, which we need to hear: *"I have food to eat that you know nothing about."* The disciples were confused and wondered who brought him food.

Without chiding them, Jesus simply said His food was to do the will of Him who sent Him and to finish God's work. In other words, He found nourishment by doing God's will. I just don't believe this is all poetic talk. It reminds me of the verse: "Seek first the Kingdom of God." Joy, nourishment, and peace will fill our church when we reach out to others with the gospel.

In verse 35, Jesus reminded them of a local expression: *"Four more months and then the harvest,"* but in reality Jesus said: "Open your eyes: the harvest is now ripe." I say to you the same thing: open your eyes and look around.

When Scripture says four more months and then the harvest, it was probably a quotation of a current proverb. In essence, it meant once you sowed your grain all you had to do was wait for it to grow. But Jesus was pointing out that the spiritual harvest is *now* ready and like normal harvests must be reaped before it spoils. (Show picture and talk about the cranberry bogs in Massachusetts: where we once lived.) Once they began to harvest, everything else took second place because the harvest would spoil and

everything they worked so hard for would be lost. No doubt, by Jesus putting it this way, He too was putting a time limit on the harvest. Don't sleep or play away the harvest.

As He was speaking, the Samaritans were coming to Him and no doubt Jesus pointed to them even though the Jewish people would reject them. Jesus sent them His disciples to reap what they have not worked for and others have done the hard work and now you get to reap the benefits of their labor. He was talking about the prophets who went before Him, who suffer greatly for the cause of Christ. But it's true now even more. God wants to do an end times harvest again. He told us to open our eyes because the time is drawing near.

B. Universalists

Leighton Ford, in the preface to James Emery White's book, *Rethinking the Church*, identified the United States as the "largest mission field in the English-speaking world." The American culture is largely post-Christian, but the church is God's tool to reach a lost world. In other words, when believers labor to build the church, they participate in the King's business.

A church can become ingrown (makes me groan). When it cares for its own needs, it becomes more about making the church people happy, paying the bills, keeping up on church programs, rather than reaching out to those we have been sent to. Now those are some real-time realities, but we can't lose focus of the mission. In this case, the people we touch everyday: our community and the parts of the world where we support missionaries.

We need to examine the arena of what the Bible calls *lost*. The Bible uses the word lost to describe being away from the Father's house and not knowing the way home. When Jesus saw the crowds around Him, Jesus saw them as sheep without shepherds—helpless and hopeless, and He was deeply moved.

Throughout Church history, there have been those who took this very seriously, with varying outcomes. Some have given their lives and resources to make it happen; others have come up with some strange doctrines so they could feel better about themselves.

To those who couldn't handle the strength of the Bible truth, came the teaching called Universalism—one-size-fits-all. In the end, since God is love and we are all children of God, as my biological father once told me, he could not imagine sending me to eternal hell. God will forgive everyone, even those who spit in His face. There are some churches that actually teach this, *but in reality most people believe this*.

The only problem with that teaching is why, then, would Jesus bother giving His life on the cross for our sins? If all sins will ultimately be overlooked, Christ never should've died. What a mistake, Jesus!

But then a New Universalism started in the 20th century that took the Bible more seriously. They believe that Jesus died for all sinners and all would be ultimately saved on that basis. In other words, the blood of Christ will still save the worst enemy of God. The blood of Christ will still save the person who trusts even in a false deity.

But there is a problem with that: Why did Jesus make so much of eternal hell: that there is a great gulf between the saved and the lost? Was Jesus the original exaggerator? Did Jesus lie? Was Jesus just trying to scare us into believing in Him?

Then, there was what they called the Wider Hope. Not all would be saved but many who had not heard of Christ would be saved because God is just and will not condemn the sincere seeker. It is the same way with the modern belief that if your grandmother didn't know God but was good at baking brownies and helping other people in society, Christ would forgive her.

But sincerity alone never works in any field of endeavor. Could you imagine a very sincere bridge builder or a building engineer who was just inaccurate? Could you imagine a pharmacist who doesn't give proper mixtures of chemicals to make your medicine, but was very sincere? The bridge would fall and you would wind up one day drinking poison. Sincerity does not alter reality.

Then there was what they called the New Wider Hope. Those who live by the light that they already have would be saved on the merits of Christ death through General Revelation. Or at least, they would be given a chance at death or after death. (General Revelation is how people can see God in nature, the cycles of life, etc, specific Revelation is either the Word or Jesus.)

Let me be careful to point out that there is something to this. The Bible says the Judge of the earth will do right. We have many examples of people around the world that never had a witness for Christ coming to Christ because of a supernatural sign. But people still have to come to Christ. I believe the more someone responds to light, the more God gives light. It's why some Muslim-born people are seeing visions of Jesus.

But taken to extremes, if this were the case, it should be a crime to give to missions. We should take anybody who tries to preach the gospel across the world and execute them. I'm serious, because a person's ignorance would be their best chance of salvation. If someone gives someone knowledge about Jesus, but then they refuse to listen, had they been left in their ignorance, they would have been saved forever. So in a sense, the missionary condemned his listeners to everlasting torment.

Let me be clear: do you believe that a person who does not know Jesus Christ will be lost throughout eternity? I do, whether they live in Timbuktu or if they live in Colchester, Connecticut. I didn't say they had to go to our church or believe exactly like we do but because we are all sinners under the wrath of God, only Christ's blood sets us free.

This then puts an entire new way of thinking into our missions and evangelism. Reaching out to others is not simply to add to our church so we have more people like a social club; it is the most imperative activity that will take place while we're alive—reaching people for Christ.

“The greatest mystery is why those who are charged with rescuing the lost have spent 2000 years doing other things, good things, perhaps, but have failed to send and be sent until all have heard the liberating word of life in Christ Jesus.” Robertson McQuilkin

C. 2012?

A few of you have asked about 2012. Many of you know a new blockbuster movie was recently released about this date. It all revolves around the Mayan calendar that ends in 2012. Other secular sources have claimed that 2012 will be end! Do I believe this: no! (But it might be a great chance to witness to your friends). Jesus said He would return and after seven years the world would be destroyed. Do I believe Jesus could return in 2012? Sure, but He also could come back in 2009 or possibly in 2109. We don't know: but we are told to keep on plugging away at His Great Commission till he brings us home.

But, by definition, we are in the last days. Peter told us this, as did Paul. This means two things: First, it is the last age. Before we had the Law, the Church age, the next age will be on our new earth as the Bride of Christ. Whether this happens in your lifetime or several generations from now, we are living in the last days. Second, it means you only have one short life. The Bible says your life is like a breath (exhale or a mist). Time to get to work! We have 18 gazillion years to enjoy real life; in the mean time, can we build our relationship with Christ and each other, roll up our sleeves and get to work?

Conclusion: His Mission: Our Mission:

As His final command, Jesus instructed His disciples to see evangelism as their very reason for being. Thankfully, Jesus did not send them out in their own strength; He gave them His authority. They were both authorized and enabled for the task. Jesus gave them no geographical restriction with regards to the commission; the disciples were to take the message to the whole world. David Olson: *“If the church is to be faithful to its Lord and bring joy to his heart, it must be engaged in bringing the Gospel to all people.”*

The Church's mission must follow the Master's mission. In *The American Church in Crises*, David Olson points out five purposes of the mission of Jesus.

1) The first aspect of Christ's mission was to be the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world on the cross. Not that we can do this, but we can tell the world. It must be our highest priority.

2) The Lord's mission was to fight the decisive battle with Satan, triumphing through the grave. Through the grave, Jesus won the victory over death and Satan. Now we are in a battle. This is why the church must rediscover two methods; Prayer (describe Praying church in Korea) and being filled with the Holy Spirit. President Bryon Klaus aptly said, "*The baptism in the Spirit is an un-mined treasure.*"

3) Christ's mission was to authenticate himself as the Son of God through the resurrection. The resurrection is the message of joy, hope, and victory, the first fruit of God's ultimate triumph over the enemy. The mission of the church can only be properly carried out when one grasps the true meaning of Jesus' resurrection and His soon return. God calls the Church to live the resurrected life here and now; the Church is supposed to serve as a force against death and destruction.

4) Jesus' mission entailed challenging earthly principalities and powers through His ascension. The ascension is related to the future return of Christ in both the judgment and the final redemption. With this knowledge of judgment day, the Church must reach a lost and dying world. Olson warns, "The judgment day is the moment of absolute despair for those who choose an existence apart from the presence of the Lord Jesus." The ascension promises Jesus' return, the glory of the ascension, however, remains linked to the agony of the cross. In other words, one cannot enjoy the glory of the ascension without the agony of the cross. Therefore, believers must embrace a life of suffering.

5) The mission of Jesus focused on establishing His Church as the new people of God through the Day of Pentecost. The Church does not replace the people of God as in the Old Testament, but rather fulfills the Abrahamic covenant, which used faith to mark out the people of God under both the old and new covenants. The Church is a fellowship, a *koinonia*, where God's love flows in daily life. Through the Church, justice and righteousness are made present in the world. The love exhibited in the Early Church gave believers boldness in the face of adversity and opposition.

(Ask for renewed health and call for the priority of the Mission.)

--Charles F. Brown

The Mission of the Church—Part 2

Date: November 22, 2009

Scripture: Nehemiah 1; Ephesians 2:11-22

Topic: A summary of my project

Introduction

I love the New Year, the freshness, the new start. I'm a big goal-setter. Here's my top goal: Have consistency in 2010: anyone can do from time to time but consistency gets the reward.

A. Nehemiah's Burden

Quickly review the way Israel was divided into North and South mostly because of the terrible sin of Solomon and the other kings after him. Finally, God had enough and His people from the North were taken into exile. Decades later the same thing happened with the South, which was Jerusalem. Normally the south was more godly than the north, but after sometime, they gave all their energy to the enemy of our souls.

By the time of Nehemiah and Ezra, the exile had already taken them into Babylon and the people that remained were given permission to rebuild the Temple but because of persecution and hardship they did nothing. Nehemiah was one of the exiles and was someone who worked in the Persian king's palace as a cupbearer. His job was to make sure the Kings food was safe, and it was a very important position, here was one of God's people serving in the pagan king's palace and being a good witness.

One day one of his brothers came from Judah. Nehemiah asked him how it was going with the remnant that survived the exile and how Jerusalem was being rebuilt. (I've mentioned this before but the theology of remnant is vital in the Bible. God's people are most often NOT the most numerous, but the remnant is more powerful than the many). He told them that there was great disgrace, that the walls have been broken down, and the gates burned with fire. When Nehemiah heard this, he sat down and wept and mourned and fasted and prayed for some time to God. I want to read the prayer of Nehemiah because it is very beautiful and speaks to our current generation. (Starting in verse five.) He calls God the one who was great and awesome (the word awesome does not mean really cool, but rather inspires great awe and wonder, something so strong you want to hide from). He is a God who keeps His covenant of love with those who love Him and obey Him and His commands. He reminded God that he was praying day and night and then he confessed the sins of Israel including himself and his father's house. He confessed that they had acted very wickedly and how they had not obeyed God's law at all.

He reminded God, (really he was reminding his own faith because God needs no reminding) the instruction given to Moses that if they were unfaithful God would send them into exile among the nations but if they returned to God and obeyed God then even if their exile people were at the farthest horizon, He would gather them back to the place that he had chosen as a dwelling place for His name. He prayed not for God to fix the situation but prayed for success to grant him favor in the presence of the king. Nehemiah's king was not Jewish, but from Persia, a pagan king, but he saw that Nehemiah was saddened. This pagan king allowed Nehemiah to go back to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Now those walls have been knocked down and destroyed many times. Today, they are absolutely gigantic and miles to walk around. (I did it recently). I love the fact that he doesn't just pray for other people to do something about it but he prays for strength to do the work.

For 52 straight days, they worked to rebuild the walls, often with a weapon in one hand and a tool in the other—some worked at guarding, others worked at rebuilding. Finally they completed the wall and Nehemiah said his enemies, who tried to intimate him, were the ones who were afraid, and had lost their confidence, because they realized the work had been done with the help of God. In other words, they worked, but God received the credit.

B. The Church

Many preachers use Nehemiah to teach people how to rebuild the church. It's that warrior attitude, with the weapon of prayer in one hand and using your muscles and heart in the other. My goal is this series and in my 4-year project has been to do just that: together let's build the church. Paul demonstrates that our work in this church is of utmost importance. At one time, God's people were all Jews, but in Christ, we now have become His people also. We are all one.

You were excluded from citizenship in Israel, which meant you were foreigners to the promise without hope and without God in the world. Many of you grew up thinking that you were superior because you were not Jewish; you thought wrong. But now in Christ Jesus, we who were once far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. You were Gentiles by birth and called uncircumcised, which meant you were cut off from the promises of God. You can't read promises made to Abraham and claim them anymore than I can claim a promise made to you by someone else.

Jesus is our peace and He made the two one. We have sung this song but misunderstood it: it means the dividing wall between Jewish people and Gentiles is abolished and now we are one and the same people of God. We both have access to the Father by the One Spirit because of the work of Christ. Now we are no longer foreigners but fellow citizens with the Jews and members of God's household

This household, The Church, is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets and Jesus is the chief cornerstone. A cornerstone is not a plaque, but rather it is the main stone which holds the building together.

In Jesus the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy Temple in the Lord. Please understand that when Paul uses the word building he does not mean the building we sit in right now; the temple of the Lord and a church building are two different animals. The temple of the Lord is the place that God choose to dwell in by His Spirit and very often His presence was so strong that no one could go to the building. But the church building is designed to house the people of God as they come together for worship. The people, not the building, are really the church. Now in a very real sense when we show respect to this building, because of its symbolic nature, it shows respect for God and the Holy Spirit.

Here's key: In Jesus we are being built together (Jew and Gentile) to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit.

C. Metaphors of the Church

Because we are very familiar with the church, we feel like we understand it already and so to preach on it seems a bit boring. We'd rather hear messages about salvation or the end of the world or how many angels it takes to do something. But the church is a mystery and, in order to please God, we have to be about what He is into.

The word "church" is found over 100 times in the New Testament and Jesus said it first in Matthew 16:18: *"I will build my church."* He said this before the church was even thought of. It comes from a compound word that means "out" and "to call." It was a group of citizens called out and assembled for a specific purpose. It is not an original term, but the word has been found dated from the fifth century BC. Rather, the early church adopted it. So it is those whom God has called out of sin into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ and who have become fellow citizens with God's people as it says in Ephesians 2:19.

The English word for church originated from the Greek meaning belonging to the Lord. Today the word church is used in a variety of ways. It often refers to a building where believers meet or can refer to a local fellowship or to denomination or even a religion (the Church of England). The word is often used to refer to all born-again believers regardless of their geographical and cultural differences. The Bible uses numerous metaphorical descriptions to help us to understand what the church is really about.

People of God: The apostle Paul borrowed this expression from the Old Testament and applied it to the New Testament church (2 Corinthians 6:16). The church is depicted as God's people so don't put it down and don't minimize it. Though we believe in free will, God is ultimately in charge and so the church is His body. The people of this church were in no way arbitrarily selected but you were chosen to be here.

Also, the people of God are referred to as believers, brothers, and disciples. It's not people who have a simple mental belief but who have trusted Christ for their

whole salvation and seek to live after Him. The word disciple means a pupil or someone who learns. It really means someone who becomes just like the Master. Did you know that the word Christian does not mean someone who believes in Christ? It is someone who is in Christ's stead. It's more like an ambassador of Christ. We do what He is called to do. He calls us out of darkness and forms us to be like Him.

Saints: Over 100 times in the New Testament the people of God are referred to as saints. Unlike the belief of a certain church, it is not some man-made rule to become a saint, but it's anyone who has been changed by Christ's blood. The actual word is translated from holy ones. It means we are called to be holy (1 Cor. 1:2). It is someone who is willing to die to self and give all to Christ. Not that we are saved by works, but Bonhoeffer had a favorite term: "costly grace."

Body of Christ: This has a beautiful meaning to it. It was one of Paul's favorite expressions and compared the parts of the human bodies to the inter-relationships and functions of the members of the church. The body is a unit and made up of many parts; so it is with Christ (1 Cor. 12:12). This is why division of the church is so evil. It is far better to leave a church that you don't agree with them to split it down the middle. Christians need to have unity and mutual concern because we were baptized by one Spirit into the body.

A final aspect that is integral to the image of the body is the body's relation to its Head, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the head of the body, the leader, and Christ both sustains and is the source of life for the church.

Temple of the Spirit: This is another very meaningful New Testament image for the church and is depicted as the home of the Holy Spirit. If you ever read through the Old Testament from Genesis to Malachi, you will be struck how often the Temple is built, destroyed, rebuilt. So much time is spent on building materials, on who built the parts of the Temple and even who tried to destroy the Temple. No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid which is Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11). This simply means that the place the Holy Spirit chooses to dwell in is no longer the tabernacle or the Temple but it is in the Christian's heart and when the Christians come together in love and unity that is when the Holy Spirit is most present. Remember the very strong Scripture that Jesus said where two or three are gathered in my name I am there.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17: "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's spirit lives in you?"

We have to explain how important the temple was. (Show the pictures of the Wailing Wall in the Temple Mount.) Jewish people spend hours rocking back and forth at the Temple. (Describe how the Wailing Wall is not even an original wall, but a retaining wall.)

Living Stones and Cornerstone: An important component is the fact that Jesus is the cornerstone. In modern buildings a cornerstone is usually more symbolic perhaps giving the dates or crediting some key benefactor but, in the biblical times, the cornerstone is significant: it was typically larger than the other stones and helped to control the proper design for the rest of the building bringing symmetry to the remainder of the edifice. Christ is described as the chief cornerstone through whom the whole building is joined together.

Connected to the cornerstone were normal stones necessary to complete the building. Peter says we are those living stones (1 Peter 2:5). The word Peter uses is a common Greek word for stone. Remember his real name was Simon and Jesus gave him this name. The word we are familiar with is *petros*, which means a loose stone or a small pebble and *petra* means a solid rock sufficient to build on. Remember that Jesus told the people they could destroy the Temple that had taken years to build and He would restore it in three days, speaking of His body. Today, we are that body.

I believe in the church worldwide, but still the local church is what matters. We have to believe in the local church. The way some of you treat the church you would think it was man's idea—coming in late, letting others do the work in the church instead of you, waking up and deciding if you should go to church when we are commanded to not avoid church.

In order to do this, we must understand the church and what God has to do about the church. Nehemiah cared for Jerusalem because He understood God chose to place His glory there. I'm afraid some of you don't have such a high view of the church. You treat it like your favorite restaurant. If they're serving good food that day you attend if not you go to another restaurant or just stay home and eat your own food. That is the wrong attitude: church is about giving, not receiving.

D. The Local Church

No church can ever rest on its laurels. The power of the church is found in the Holy Spirit, not in its history. As Jesus said in John 7, if we believe in Jesus "streams of living water will flow from out of us." For too long, the church has relied on human tactics and strategies, but they have left out the one source that would guarantee success: the Holy Spirit. The church leader needs to build a church that is filled with disciples who move in the Spirit of God. The church needs to have people with spiritual gifts, who come prepared for church, but know how to move in the Spirit and go whatever is the Lord's direction.

It is important to realize that the church's strength is not in the music of the church, nor on its programs, but rather that the church is connected to the power of God, to the Holy Spirit. The challenge for today's church is to learn how to discern God's purposes for the church.

We must not allow the government or secular organizations to make society a better place to live and enjoy. God does not only care about whether a person goes to heaven, but He also cares about whether they are well-fed, if there is justice in the world, and whether there is love in society.

The Church is of eternal importance: this thought has greatly moved me. I must confess that I often have looked at human organizations, such as hospitals and major corporations as having such great importance in the world, but I know those groups will fade away when the world is renewed.

What a privilege to know that we have been given this powerful ministry of reconciliation by the Lord Jesus Christ. This gives me great confidence that Jesus will always be involved in the ministry because He passionately cares about the mission. It also gives me a fervency to do the ministry correctly because it is not my mission, but rather His mission. It was God who originated this mission because it was His character. I love what a professor taught us: *“Jesus enfleshed the mission.”* Romans 5:8 tells us that God gave His life way before those He died for we even thought of His love.

We are not allowed to get sloppy or to get lazy in church work because each church is God’s church and is a reflection of His glory. The church leader should realize it is not the congregation or denominational leader who we should work for, but for the Lord Jesus Christ.

E. Your Local Church

As I’ve mentioned many times, the church has two natures: the one being the church universal and the other the local church. Obviously, Jesus is in charge of both, but the universal church is everyone who Jesus died for. That would include people who are in churches with doctrines we don’t fully agree with because you are not saved by following the doctrine or even a practice but by giving Jesus Christ your heart and life.

Ideally the local church should be a replica of the church universal that it is made up of persons from all backgrounds, racial or ethnic cultures, and different social economical levels who are born again. But we tend to think, and it is wrong, that Jesus died for the church at large but the local church is man-made: if you believe that, you will treat the church the way you do. When in fact, I believe it was the Holy Spirit’s calling that this church stand and I believe that I was placed here at this strategic time and so were you. I challenge you to act like it.

In our church, we developed three key letters that help us to remember our specific tasks. The first one is G—and it means to gather. It is a place to corporately worship and pray in a place where the Holy Spirit can dwell here in power. The O. stands for outreach and it means that we are called to reach out to both our local community (wherever you happen to live) and wherever God gives us our mission field. This includes activities like the Live Nativity Scene but it also includes the money we give for Mozambique, Africa. The D. stands for disciple or discipleship and it means we are to be a place where Christians

can grow in Christ both in their relationship with God, their family, and in the world they live in.

Conclusion: How You Should Treat Your Church

1. You must realize that every one of us, regardless of our age, lives in a selfish culture. Advertisements for service to think about ourselves first because “we deserve a break today.” Yet Jesus calls us to put others first.
2. We need to look at the amount of effort, money, and heart we put into the church. Most of you need to ask this question: “Would you treat your secular job like you treat your church?” If so, how many of you would keep your job at your next review?
3. As I’ve said 100 times, the church is not like a show you attend but it is more like a Thanksgiving meal we all share together. Certainly there is one major cook, but Uncle Steve brought some lasagna, Sister Mary brought one of her famous pies, the younger men fix the tables and make it big enough, everyone chipped in to clean up. This is your church.

I was talking to my oldest granddaughter. I love to quiz her on family things. One day I asked her what her daddy did for a living and she knew perfectly. Then I asked her what I did for a living and she said I owned the church that we all go to. That might be cute but it’s inaccurate. Everyone who was a member of this church owns this church building and, in a very real sense, everyone who is a Christian is part of the church worldwide and if this is your church, you need to feel like it’s your church as much as I do.

4. You need to attend your church faithfully and you need to work for your church and you need to support your church. You can support your children by supporting your church. You can support other ministries to your church.

--Charles F. Brown

APPENDIX L

POWER POINT OF CHURCH VISION: G.O.D.
PRESENTED TO ABUNDANT LIFE
AUGUST 24, 2008



Gather
Gather means to provide opportunities for
fellowship that build relationships with one
another in Christ.



Outreach

Outreach means reaching the world with the love of Jesus



Disciple

Disciple means to show followers of Jesus how to grow in their faith.

APPENDIX M

DEALING WITH CONFLICT IN THE CHURCH

Dealing with conflict serves as the most difficult aspect of change. As Nelson and Appel wrote, “Like any garden, some weeds will spring up. No proven plan is perfect and no transition plan will reduce all the problems that will arise.”¹ Times of stressful change reveal a congregation’s character as many adults do not know how to manage conflict that goes as deep as the church demands. Cold-hearted and hurt people often lash out at others when confronted.

Conflict is often healthy and should not be feared because it facilitates change. In the same way that families experience conflict, the church, the body of Christ, also faces conflict. Abundant Life has experienced a speed bump as change uncovered a divisive undercurrent in the church—the leadership team has differing ideas regarding how to run the church service. Some people long for the old-fashioned Pentecostal holiness church; others desire a contemporary, small group-based church. A third group longs to be a “river church” where the Spirit of God moves hours into the night. So as not to crush some people in the church, I slowly preach regarding God’s vision and purpose for the church.² Every successful pastor must learn the painful lesson that the opinions of a few

¹Alan E. Nelson and Gene Appel, *How to Change Your Church Without Killing It* (Nashville, TN: Word, 2000), 216.

²Although I desire the moving of the supernatural power of God, I also believe that the church should be a place where unsaved people can come and hear a clear presentation of the gospel.

people should not sway him or her, instead leaders listen to God and their leadership team. Paul wrote, “Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Gal. 1:10).

APPENDIX N

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SMALL GROUPS
ON CHURCH GROWTH

Small groups are a biblical principle; the Early Church met in the Temple as well as in homes (Acts 5:42). Small groups provide an intimate setting where people can receive discipleship and hold one another accountable.¹

Larry Osborne, in *Sticky Church*, states that most church leaders pay little attention to the dilemma of the back door. While many new people become members, simultaneously more people quietly leave the church. Many churches view small groups as an add-on ministry, but Osborne believes his church achieves success when most of the people participate in small groups; he says small group ministry must be built into the spiritual DNA of the church and serve as the key to closing the back door of the church.

Church leaders often focus primarily on reaching new people, and they forget the importance of keeping the people who already belong to the church. Osborne encourages churches to close the back door by “serving their congregations so well that people don’t want to leave.”² He compares many of today’s church marketing campaigns and or special services to the bait and switch tactics of retail stores—they lure people in by offering a particular special, but the customer leaves with something completely

¹Abundant Life has embraced small group ministry as the primary tool for implementing change because it more accurately fulfills the call of reaching the lost.

²Larry W. Osborne, *Sticky Church*, The Leadership Network Innovation Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 30.

different. Osborne prefers that a visitor attend during a normal, usual, church service; otherwise, if the visitor returns, he or she might experience disappointment when the special speaker or music does not participate in the service.

If a new person attends a small group before attending a large celebration service, it is usually easier to assimilate the person into the church than if he or she attends a bells and whistles event first. Osborne and his leadership do not judge success by the weekend attendance but by the number of people involved in the small group ministries—the most crucial aspect of church life. He believes churches must launch a small group ministry with the focus of building relationships rather than growing the church.

Osborne claims that pastors should surrender the dream of reaching everyone outside of the church and focus on those already inside the church. Before his church developed their current small group ministry, he viewed the people in his church as tools for reaching outsiders rather than as a group of people to care for. Now he focuses his efforts on feeding his sheep because “Ingrown and dying churches don’t take care of the flock. They appease the flock.”³

The author gives several excellent reasons for creating a church of small group Bible studies. First, he states that people feel less threatened by small groups than large gatherings; people can view small groups as a form of “spiritual window-shopping.”⁴ Second, small groups provide wonderful places for people to find Christ. One-on-one evangelism is difficult and door to door evangelism in today’s culture creates obstacles. Consequently, inviting a person to a home small group is a natural way of inviting people to the church without the intimidation factors.

³Ibid., 27.

⁴Ibid., 34.

Third, small groups are more adequately equipped to handle individualized needs in the group. Young Christians experience the most growth during times of great need or challenge to their faith. Osborne uses the example of the door-to-door visit from the local Mormon, who will inevitably bring on questions of doctrine regarding the Trinity or the Deity of Christ. At the next small group, the young Christian will come hungry to learn so as to clear up the confusion in his or her mind. Had the Bible study simply taught on the Trinity or the deity, previous to the unwelcomed visit by the Mormon, the teaching would not have had the impact on the believer.⁵

Fourth, small group ministry makes room for more church leaders to be used in the church. Osborne believes that when the people think the pastor can do everything, it cripples the church. In addition, this perspective tends to overburden the pastor and underutilize the rest of the congregation in their own gifts. Fifth, believers increase the practice of spiritual disciplines when involved in a small group. People are overly busy today, and small groups help take that into account by recognizing people will only participate in a few items each week. Many church lay leaders carry too many responsibilities, both in the workplace and community; consequently, the church loses these leaders because it has too many events on the calendar. When planning church events, Osborne always asks the question: How will this event impact the small groups?

A church must decide on the purpose of its small group ministry—discipleship, evangelism, shepherding the flock, or administrating the church. Osborne's church utilizes small groups to foster "significant Christ-centered relationships."⁶ Small groups provide an excellent environment for people to minister to their friends because "friends

⁵Ibid., 42.

⁶Ibid., 111.

naturally assimilate friends.”⁷ He says that twenty-five percent of people claim they have no significant relationships outside of their family; those who do can only claim a few.⁸ His church judges small group success by the stories of mortgages and rents paid, meals provided, holidays shared together, and other great sacrificial stories.

Osborne believes that a small group should set limits on the number of weeks the group meets, with a maximum of ten weeks. This allows people who are not connecting to the group to bow out gracefully. On other occasions, “extra grace required” members have the opportunity to change small groups.⁹ By limiting the time commitment, the group leader, knowing that he or she will carry the leadership responsibility for a short period of time, does not become overwhelmed.

⁷Ibid., 35.

⁸Ibid., 104.

⁹Ibid., 112.

APPENDIX O

THE CHURCH FACILITY AND ITS BEARING
ON THE GROWTH OF THE CHURCH

An important determination of a church's growth potential is the size of its physical facilities. Each leader needs to ask the hard questions: how large of a sanctuary does the church need, when should the church move to multiple worship services, and does the church require extra educational space? The church building should be captivating to guests and, in the United States, have enough parking. Rainer writes that "The rule of thumb in church growth is that when 80% of any facility is in use, it is time to make provisions for more room."¹ This applies to parking, the sanctuary, nursery, and educational space. Apparently, large shopping malls are built with the idea that their facilities should never be completely filled except during one or two key holiday periods. In the same way, "A packed sanctuary, or parking lot sends the message that there is no more room."² Parking is very crucial; people will come from very long distances to a church they enjoy, but they must have parking.

Often, a church can solve its building space problems by adding additional worship services. This provides an added benefit to baby boomers and baby Busters, who are

¹Thom S. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth: History, Theology, and Principles* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993), 272.

²Ibid.

“accustomed to options in all phases of their lives.”³ However, many churches that choose multiple services neglect to consider the size of the church’s parking lot. Adding another service with the time in-between for Sunday school might correct the sanctuary size problem, but this might cause uncomfortable traffic jams in the parking lot since both services are in the parking lot at the same time.

If the church wants to reach young families, it must provide adequate preschool space and properly pre-screened workers. No young parent wants to leave his or her child in a room with wall-to-wall preschoolers, and dangerous workers that were never pre-screened. Church leaders talk about thirty square feet as a minimal space for each child in first grade and younger; twenty square feet is the minimal for an older child, youth, or adult.⁴

The church must exude quality. A person seeking a church should not be turned away because of sloppy facilities. “The unkempt church may convey a lackadaisical attitude about other matters to the unchurched.”⁵ The church must be clean, the frayed carpets and the peeling wallpaper dealt with; also, lighting and sound can make a big difference in church worship service. A church that wants to reach the unchurched will have a facility that speaks a friendly welcome to them.

To build way beyond the actual growth of the church and building too quickly are equally dangerous. The church that builds beyond its present needs will experience “what social psychologists call the psycho spatial dynamics.” If the sanctuary is too large the excitement might quickly be replaced by a sense that decline is taking place, even when

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., 273.

⁵Ibid., 276.

it's not. A church should still be attractive and well-constructed, but if the church is declining or plateauing for other reasons is unlikely that improving those facilities will bring about church growth.

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