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TRANSFORMING MISSION CULTURE IN CHURCH REVITALIZATION: A MIXED METHODS STUDY

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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Doctor of Education

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by

Michael Wesley Richardson

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APPROVAL SHEET

TRANSFORMING MISSION CULTURE IN CHURCH REVITALIZATION: A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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For my bride, Natalie, and for Christ's bride, the church

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PREFACE

This project solidified the commitment and captivation that Christ has birthed in my heart for local church ministry. While local church ministry is draining and difficult, every church leader has the immense privilege to connect the people they shepherd to the story and mission of God "existing before the foundation of the world." My prayer is that God will awaken local churches to the partnership and fellowship they have in the *missio Dei* in order to restore and redeem those in their community for God's glory.

The relationships cultivated throughout this process have become the greatest gifts of the journey. I am grateful to my cohort for their collective encouragement, insight, passion, and laughter they brought to my life. I am especially grateful for the meals, conversations, and prayers shared with Adam, Mike, Chris, Scott, Andrew, Dan, and David. I am also grateful for Brian, Dean, and Don who adopted me into their revitalization research team. Your trailblazing instilled in me the confidence to keep going and without your help I would have been lost.

I had the blessing of having two different guides and mentors for this project. I am grateful to Dr. Michael Wilder for getting me off in the right direction, and for Dr. Danny Bowen who shepherding me throughout the process. Your accessibility and pastoral approach to academia motivated me when I was discouraged or struggling.

This project came to fruition because of the shared encouragement and sacrifice of my family. Thank you to my children Eliza, Henry, and Sam for your inspiration to push me to get my "school-work" done, even when I had to miss time with you. School is over! The highest gratitude goes to my beautiful wife Natalie. You were my constant source of strength and encouragement and carried the weight of our family in many different times in order for me to succeed. We did this together, and I am

eternally grateful to Christ for the treasured gift that you are. I am privileged to live life and serve Christ with you. I love you!

Mike Richardson

Tequesta, Florida
December 2020

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The American church has reached a "tipping point."[1] The majority of evangelical churches in America have either plateaued or are in decline.[2] Missiologist David Bosch prophetically surmises, "The Church is always in a state of crisis . . . its greatest shortcoming is that it is only occasionally aware of it."[3] While there has been an ongoing conversation among researchers about the extent of the crisis, to church leaders, the warning sirens ring loud and clear. According to Thom Rainer, around 6,000-10,000 churches die each year.[4] The situation is just as dire in the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). While the number of churches partnering with the SBC and overall church attendance has increased in 2017, church membership and baptisms are down.[5] Church planting has been found to be an effective way to impact the vast lostness

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[1] Thom Rainer, "Why American Churches Are at a Tipping Point," Facts & Trends, January 22, 2019, https://factsandtrends.net/2019/01/22/why-american-churches-are-at-a-tipping-point/. Rainer posits that if the current trajectory of decline continues, the American church will follow the path of the European church in the past century. Rainer also surmises that if there is no large-scale revitalization push in the American evangelical church, then there will be an accelerated rate of church decline and death.

[2] Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson conclude that around 70 to 80 percent of North American churches are stagnant or in decline, with around 3,500 to 4,000 churches closing each year. Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville: B&H, 2007), 19. Albert Mohler states that around 80 to 90 percent of churches in America are not growing. R. Albert Mohler Jr., "Christ Will Build and Rebuild His Church: The Need for 'Generational Replant,'" in *A Guide to Church Revitalization*, ed. R. Albert Mohler Jr. (Louisville, KY: SBTS Press, 2015), 8. Thom Rainer has more encouraging numbers from more recent research on SBC churches. He states that 56 percent of churches are declining, 9 percent of churches are plateaued, and 35 percent of churches are growing. Thom Rainer, "Dispelling the 80 Percent Myth of Declining Churches," June 28, 2019, http://thomrainer.com/2017/06/dispelling-80-percent-myth-declining-churches/.

[3] David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Omni Books, 1991), 2-3.

[4] Thom S. Rainer, "Hope for Dying Churches," Facts & Trends, January 16, 2018, https://factsandtrends.net/2018/01/16/hope-for-dying-churches/.

[5] Lisa Cannon Green, "Worship Attendance Rises, Baptisms Decline in SBC," Facts & Trends, June 1, 2018, https://factsandtrends.net/2018/06/01/worship-attendance-rises-baptisms-decline-in-sbc/.

of North America[6] however, there have not been enough successful church plants to stem the tide of church decline in the American evangelical and SBC churches.[7] New research published by Lifeway shows that only 7 percent of churches are reproducing and under 1 percent of churches could be considered multiplying churches.[8] Given the state of the church, leaders of declining and plateaued churches must develop and cultivate a culture of mission that not only transforms those outside the church, but actually transforms the people of God within the local congregations.

The proposed research consisted of an individual research study as part of a larger study conducted by a team of seven Doctor of Education students at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The study examined factors present in church revitalizations within the SBC. The larger study examined how changes in discipleship, evangelism, leadership, missions, prayer, and worship are present in church revitalizations. The research was conducted in three phases. The research team jointly conducted a quantitative study. Each individual team member proceeded with a

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When reflecting on the vitality of the SBC, there are some reasons to be hopeful. Overall attendance at SBC churches rose by 2.3 percent from 2016 to 2017. The number of churches cooperating with the SBC grew for the nineteenth consecutive year in 2017 to 47,544. That is an overall increase of 16.3 percent since 1997. However, the SBC is showing signs of decline that should cause great concern. Overall membership in the SBC dropped for the eleventh consecutive year, and total membership is down 1.3 million members since 2006. Baptisms have also declined for the eighth time in the last ten years, and the overall baptism percentage is down 26.5 percent compared to 2007.

[6] Ed Stetzer and Phillip Connor, *Church Plant Survivability and Health Study 2007* (n.p.: Center for Missional Research, 2007), 47, accessible at Ed Stetzer, "Church Planting Research," *Christianity Today*, September 5, 2007, https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2007/september/church-planting-research.html.

[7] Bill Henard, *Can These Bones Live? A Practical Guide to Church Revitalization* (Nashville: B&H, 2015), 5.

[8] Lifeway Research, "Becoming Five Multiplication Study 2019," accessed May 1, 2019, http://lifewayresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/2019ExponentialReport.pdf. This was a phone survey of one thousand Protestant pastors carried out January 14-30, 2019. The sample provides 95 percent confidence, and the sampling error does not exceed 3.2 percent. The study defines a reproducing church as one that places a high value and priority on starting new churches. These churches continually feel the tension of investing in their own church verses starting other churches. Multiplying churches are characterized by multiplying, releasing, and sending everyday missionaries and church planters. While this research does show that around 30 percent of Protestant churches are growing in some way, the majority of Protestant churches have less than ten people indicating a new commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior in the past twelve months.

qualitative study drawn from the shared quantitative data. The final goal of the overall study was to provide holistic, empirical data to support revitalization assumptions and efforts. This portion of the overall study is focused on churches that changed their mission culture to aid in church revitalization.

The Research Problem

Empirical church revitalization studies are essential because North American churches are closing at an alarming pace. Places of worship that once were thriving centers of spiritual growth and life change in their community are now being turned into community centers, nightclubs, and microbreweries.[9] America has become increasingly a majority-unchurched nation.[10] While new churches are helping to reach the growing unchurched and irreligious population, declining churches must adjust to continue the missional work that Christ empowered the church to carry out in his name.

The sobering news for the church is many existing congregations are in decline because they have become focused on their individual preferences and needs rather than the needs of their community. Through his many years of research on the church, Thom Rainer notes that an "inwardly focused" church is one of the tell-tale symptoms of impending church death.[11] *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* surmises that a church cannot

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[9] *CBS News*, "Closed Churches Finding New Lives as – Breweries," October 6, 2017, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/closed-churches-new-lives-breweries/. Websites like http://xhurches.org/ keep accounts of what communities are doing with closed churches. This is the wrong kind of church revitalization. Mohler notes that churches in England have been transitioned to circus schools, grocery stores, car dealerships, libraries, pubs, and Islamic mosques. Mohler, "Christ Will Build and Rebuild His Church," 7.

[10] Pew Research Center, "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace: An Update on America's Changing Religious Landscape," Pew Research Center Religion & Public Life, October 17, 2019, https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/. The number of Americans who would have identified as Christians has dropped twelve percentage points to 65 percent over the last decade, while the number of those who identify as atheist, agnostic, or "nothing in particular" has risen to 26 percent.

[11] Thom Rainer, "Why Dying Churches Die," August 9, 2017, https://thomrainer.com/2017/08/dying-churches-die/. Rainer defines "inwardly focused" as the pursuit of comfort and palatability for members, over the pursuit of reaching the community.

survive long-term when members are focused on themselves.[12] Bill Henard, in his book *Can These Bones Live?*, declares that when the church no longer ministers to the community, they lose their ministerial effectiveness as well as the privilege to speak into the lives of those in the community.[13]

The reasons for this inward drift are many, but the fact of the matter is that these inwardly focused churches begin to value their thoughts, dreams, and wishes over partnership in the *missio Dei*. Inwardly focused churches become resistant to the change needed to be a church which brings value to the community.[14] The church begins to view itself in what Dan White calls the "church industrial complex." White describes this complex as the belief that the survival and success of the church is based on collecting and consolidating more resources, more programs, paid staff, property, and people in attendance.[15] The declining church submits to the sinful, selfish desire to pull resources toward its own center, thus creating a culture where many churches are flush with resources and real estate but do not resonate with the wider culture.[16]

The *Missio Dei* and Church Revitalization

As unhealthy churches drift inward, they cease their partnership in the *missio Dei* causing spiritual atrophy. There has been much scholarly debate and a historical progression surrounding the essence of the *missio Dei*.[17] John Stott puts forth the idea

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[12] Thom Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 49.

[13] Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 197.

[14] Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 49.

[15] J. R. Woodward and Dan White Jr., *The Church as Movement: Starting and Sustaining Missional-Incarnational Communities* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2016), 25.

[16] Woodward and White, *The Church as Movement*, 26.

[17] John Stott and Christopher Wright, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Grand Rapids: IVP Press, 2015), chap. 2, Kindle. A longer discussion on the *missio Dei* and mission is conducted in chap. 2 of this thesis.

that God, by his nature, is a "sending" God.[18] God, in his makeup, is centrifugal. The Trinity is always moving outward. God has been and will always be reaching out in self-giving love to himself and his creation.[19] God is constantly, persistently on his mission. He has gone to great lengths to make his presence available to his creation.[20] The essence of mission is "sentness." The church has been sent into the world to bear witness to the good news of the gospel.[21]

In their book *Comeback Church*, Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson give hope for churches that have succumbed to the inward drift that initiated and influenced church decline. Stetzer and Dodson's research showed that a church whose leaders who led their congregation to live like missionaries were able to see a return of church health and growth.[22] Churches that were successfully revitalized were able to switch their mindset from being one of a cultural evangelist to one of a missionary living within the given community.[23] "Comeback churches" overcame the preferences of their established members by focusing on cultivating a servant's heart in their congregations.[24] These churches did not exclusively focus on their own personal spiritual maturity or needs; but

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[18] Stott and Wright, *Christian Mission*, chap. 2.

[19] Ross Hastings notes, drawing from the work of Karl Barth, the relationality of God displayed within the Trinity. One cannot separate the fact that God is love from the fact that God is a Trinity. Hastings notes the "Trinity's inner life (*in se* or *ad intra*), and the expression of that relationality in the economy of creation and redemption." Ross Hastings, *Missional God, Missional Church: Hope for Re-Evangelizing the West* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2012), 87. See also Keith Whitfield, "The Triune God: The God of Mission," in *Theology and Practice of Mission: God, the Church, and the Nations*, ed. Bruce Ashford (Nashville: B&H, 2011), 25-28.

[20] Stott and Wright, *Christian Mission*, chap. 2.

[21] Michael G. Goheen, *A Light to the Nations: The Mission Church and the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 219, Kindle.

[22] Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 56.

[23] Ed Stetzer and Thom Rainer, *Transformational Church: Creating a New Scorecard for Congregations* (Nashville: B&H, 2007), 206. Rainer and Stetzer see the attractional ("come and see") model of church waning in our post-Christian era. The church must move to a "go and tell" model of ministry. "The church is no longer the local evangelist. It is now the missionary," say Stetzer and Rainer.

[24] Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 65.

instead, they pushed their focus out into the communities that surrounded their church.[25] In other words, they believed that God has providentially provided the church with its geographical address.[26] "Comeback churches" were able to create a renewed focus on missions that led to growth.[27]

Churches that began to see new growth and health joined the *missio Dei*, seeing it as their responsibility to decipher and meet the needs of the community.[28] Ed Stetzer and Thom Rainer, in their work *Transformational Church*, note that churches that have transformed into healthy, growing churches were able to take steps to join God in his mission to redeem mankind for the sake of his glory.[29]

Missional Priorities

Churches that connect back to the *missio Dei* live out certain missional priorities that lead to a revitalization of the Spirit's growth and blessing. The church is a city on a hill, a counter-cultural movement that is distinct from the surrounding culture.[30] David Bosch predicts that the future success of the Western church depends on the church's prioritizing its mission over its existence. The church must follow God's leading by being sent out into the surrounding culture.[31] The public worship of the church must lead to the pivotal act of sending. The church is a community that is sent and changed by the gospel in order to be sent out into the local community to offer that same

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[25] Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 67.

[26] Thom Rainer, *Scrappy Church* (Nashville: B&H, 2018), chap. 5, Kindle.

[27] Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 59.

[28] Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 63.

[29] Stetzer and Rainer, *Transformational Church*, 206.

[30] Graham Hill, *Global Church: Reshaping Our Conversations, Renewing Our Mission, Revitalizing Our Churches* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 18.

[31] David Bosch, *Believing in the Future: Toward a Missiology of Western Culture* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1992), 32.

transformational Gospel hope.[32]

The process by which local churches engage in the mission of God varies from church to church. As churches participate in *missio Dei* work, they are intrinsically transformed in the process.[33] Research has shown that the act of sending resources and people outside of the church is not only impactful for the spreading of the gospel to the nations, but also it is "concurrently, transforming the individual participants."[34] Churches that sent out care, resources, and people affected not only those they aimed to help; but also the sending church itself saw growth.[35] There are many types of programs, ministries, and initiatives that churches have employed to be "sent" out into the culture. This project will explore the essence of the mission culture that not only led to community revitalization, but also led to local church revitalization.

Research Purpose

This study employs an explanatory multiphase sequential mixed methods design.[36] Explanatory sequential studies collect quantitative data first and then explain the quantitative results with in-depth qualitative data.[37] The quantitative strand contains two

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[32] Lois Barrett, "Missional Structures: The Particular Community," in *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 243, Kindle.

[33] Michael S. Wilder and Shane W. Parker, *TransforMission: Making Disciples through Short-Term Missions* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 2, Kindle.

[34] Wilder and Parker, *TransforMission*, 3.

[35] Jeffrey C. Farmer, "Church Planting Sponsorship: A Statistical Analysis of Sponsoring a Church Plant as a Means of Revitalization of the Sponsor Church" (PhD, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007), 79-80. Farmer's study found that the sponsor's church attendance increased an average of 21.5 percent in the five years after the church plant. Financial increases were also seen by the sponsor church. Designated giving increased by 77.4 percent, tithes and offerings increased by 48.4 percent, Annie Armstrong Easter missions offering increased by 26 percent, and the Lottie Moon Christmas mission offering increased by 20 percent.

[36] This individual research study exists as a component of a larger study conducted by a team of seven Doctor of Education students at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

[37] John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011), 155.

phases. The first phase identified churches meeting the criteria of "revitalization" through data from the Annual Church Profile collected by Lifeway Research.[38] The second phase employed a quantitative survey of those churches meeting the above criteria to assess the presence of intentional mission culture initiatives during the church revitalization. The third phase of the study was a qualitative strand which employed follow up interviews to explain the quantitative results.[39] The purpose of this study aimed to understand and describe the role that a culture of mission plays in revitalization for churches.[40]

Research Questions

The larger research project is comprised of seven individual research projects. All seven individual projects employed the same research questions for the quantitative strand of the project (phases 1 and 2). Each individual project then employed subject specific qualitative research questions for phase 3.

Quantitative Research Questions

Six research questions were considered. The quantitative research questions are as follows: (1) What percentage of SBC churches are plateaued or declining? (2) What percentage of SBC churches are experiencing revitalization? (3) Of those SBC churches experiencing revitalization, what percentage emphasized a culture of mission in the process of revitalization?

Qualitative Research Questions

The qualitative research questions are as follows: (4) In what ways does transforming the mission culture contribute to church revitalization? (5) What changes to

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[38] These criteria were determined jointly by the EdD research team.

[39] Creswell and Clark, *Mixed Methods Research*, 155.

[40] John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2013), 135.

the church's organizational culture facilitated effective mission culture? (6) What mission principles, priorities, and best practices can be identified for use in other revitalization contexts?

Methodology Overview

The study examines factors present in church revitalizations within the Southern Baptist Convention. The larger study examines to what extent changes in discipleship, evangelism, leadership, mission, prayer, and worship influence church revitalizations. The research team jointly conduct a mixed methods study consisting of a quantitative study that was shared and utilized by all members. Each team member then conducted a qualitative study drawn from the shared quantitative data.

Quantitative Phase

Phase 1. This quantitative study defined the criteria of "revitalization" and identified the churches from the population that meet the criteria. As defined above, the population consisted of SBC churches that have completed the Annual Church Profile as compiled by Lifeway Research.[41] In phase 1, the research team applied the revitalization criteria to this group of churches to arrive at the "revitalized" church population. This phase served to further define the group of churches for the next phase.

Phase 2. Phase 2 utilized a quantitative survey to the "revitalized" churches from phase 1. This survey combined specific questions covering the six research areas (discipleship, evangelism, leadership, mission, prayer, and worship) as each team member contributed to the survey. The purpose of this survey was to identify churches

[41] Roger S. Oldham, "The Annual Church Profile: Vital and Reliable," SBC Life, June 1, 2014, http://www.sbclife.net/Articles/2014/06/sla13. "The Annual Church Profile is an annual statistical report churches voluntarily submit to the Southern Baptist Convention. The reported numbers provide an annual snapshot of the impact Southern Baptists are making through their local churches in penetrating their communities with the Gospel."

that exhibit specific characteristics of revitalization. This group formed the subjects for the next phase. The following survey items were administered concerning the level of mission culture that occurred during the revitalization process:

1. Briefly describe the primary changes to the church's missional culture initiatives, which you perceive have contributed significantly to the revitalization.
2. Prior to the revitalization process, a healthy culture of mission existed within the church.
3. Missional culture played a significant role in the revitalization process.[42]

Qualitative Phase

Phase 3. In phase 3, interviews were conducted with churches whose revitalization included a significant component of mission culture.[43] Interviews were conducted with individuals in each church who had a significant role in leading the church through the revitalization process. Interview data was compiled and examined to determine significant principles and best practices for a culture of mission.

Definition of the Research Population

The research population consisted of churches that are members of the Southern Baptist Convention, have experienced revitalization, and have indicated that a culture of mission played a role in the revitalization.

Delimitations of the Research

The population for this study was limited to churches meeting the criteria of the methodology. As such, the following delimitations apply:

1. The research will be delimited to SBC churches that completed the ACP for the defined years and met the criteria for revitalization.

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[42] The survey items were scored on a six-point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Somewhat Disagree, 4 = Somewhat Agree, 5 = Agree, 6 = Strongly Agree.

[43] The intention was to identify and interview at least twelve churches in this phase.

2. The research will be delimited to churches that agreed to participate in the study and indicated a culture of mission played a role in the revitalization.

Limits of Generalization

The quantitative research was drawn from a specific population of churches that indicated a culture of mission played a role in the revitalization process. The results cannot be generalized back into all churches that have experienced revitalization, all SBC churches, or evangelical churches as a whole. However, the qualitative research suggested trends, themes, and practices that can be considered, shaped, and implemented in congregations beyond the study sample.

Terminology

Annual Church Profile (ACP). The Annual Church Profile is a report that a local congregation completes each year and sends to its local or state Baptist association. In turn the local or state association passes the information along to the national convention. The report contains key church information such as attendance, giving, baptism, and church membership.[44]

Church revitalization. "Revitalization is an intentional change of culture and praxis by members of a church community, after a period of church plateau or decline, which leads to greater church health and numerical growth."[45] For this study, a revitalized church is one that (1) experienced less than 10 percent growth in average yearly worship attendance over five years prior to the turnaround, (2) experienced 10 percent or greater average yearly worship attendance in two of the following five years, while (3) also achieving a 20:1 average yearly worship-attendance-to-baptism ratio in those same years.

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[44] Oldham, "Annual Church Profile."

[45] Joseph Stephen Hudson, "A Competency Model for Church Revitalization in Southern Baptist Churches: Mixed Methods Study" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 8. Chap. 2 of this thesis has a fuller discussion of the types and foci of church revitalization.

Declining church. A church experiencing a numerical decline in average yearly worship attendance of greater than 10 percent over a five-year period of time.[46]

Growing church. A church experiencing a numerical increase in average yearly worship attendance of greater than 10 percent over a period of time, coming from new disciple growth as measured by a 20:1 average yearly worship-attendance-to-baptism ratio.[47]

Inwardly focused. The inwardly focused church focuses on its own needs and preferences. The goal of the church is to make a comfortable, desirable experience for those who are part of the church by utilizing all church resources for members.

Leader. A person serving a church in a position of influence. This can be a paid or volunteer position.[48]

Long-term Missions. Long term or "career missionary service" is any trip or term of service that is beyond two years.[49]

Mission culture. The practices, initiatives, and motivations for the local church to send resources, ministry, and the message of Jesus outside the walls of church.[50]

Short-term missions. The mobilization of the church to join in God's action around the world through brief trips that have specific ministerial activities.[51] A short-term trip can be characterized as a trip of three months or less.[52]

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[46] See Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, xiii.

[47] Thom S. Rainer, "Church Growth and Evangelism in the Book of Acts," *Criswell Theological Review* 5, no. 1 (1990): 59.

[48] Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples* (Nashville: B&H, 2011), 151-54.

[49] Wilder and Parker, *TransforMission*, 16.

[50] An in-depth discussion of the concept of "mission" is explored in chap. 2 of this thesis.

[51] Rolando W. Cuellar, "Short Term Missions Are Bigger Than You Think: Missiological Implications for the Global Church," in *Effective Engagement in Short-Term Missions: Doing It Right!*, ed. Robert J. Priest (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2008), chap. 11, Kindle.

[52] Wilder and Parker, *TransforMission*, 16.

Conclusion

Church revitalization must be pursued by thousands of pastors if the American evangelical church is going to gain ground on the growing lostness of North America. Established churches who have turned their attention inward to their own needs, preferences, and desires must partner with the *missio Dei* in order to shift their focus to the community and world that needs the church to operate as it was designed to be. The church is in need of leaders who are willing to initiate a change in the church culture that produces church revitalization through a focus on partnering with the *missio Dei* via their union with Christ.

While there has been some empirical research compiled on how these "sending" and "outwardly-focused" methods of ministry change individuals in the church, there has not been any significant empirical research conducted on how cultivating mission culture affects the local church[53] This project explored the methods, attitudes, and leadership tactics of churches that providentially were led to successful revitalization through a culture of mission.

This chapter has been devoted to explaining the dire need for the church to pursue revitalization through the pathway exemplified in the *missio Dei*. Churches will be transformed as they sacrifice their personal needs and preferences by sending resources, people, and care outside the walls of the church. Church revitalization is a difficult, but obtainable goal for churches who follow the lead of Christ to live "sent."

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[53] Some of these studies are mentioned in chap. 2 of this thesis under the section titled "Missional Practices for Revitalization."

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Church decline is a consequence of a myriad of situations, consequences, decisions, and factors.[1] Chapter one presented an "inward drift" as a major component in church decline and death. As the church loses sight of its role in the *missio Dei*, it atrophies and moves toward impotence of gospel power. However, when the church is aware of its partnership in the *missio Dei* via their union with Christ, it functions as a distinct, contrasting community in missional ecclesiology, and treats every culture as a mission field. This kind of church not only affects the outside community, but the local church body will be transformed toward revitalization in what Michael Goheen calls the "blessed reflex" or "reflexive action."[2] The purpose of this chapter is to examine the relevant precedent literature pertaining to church revitalization and mission culture.

In order to understand the impact of mission culture on church revitalization, three themes will be explored. The first theme to be investigated is the need for church revitalization. Several issues will be discussed such as the state of the church, the biblical basis for church revitalization, and approaches to church revitalization. The second theme to be discussed will be transforming mission culture in the church. Concepts of church culture and changing church culture will be examined. Finally, the topic of mission

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[1] Daniel C. Eymann, "Turnaround Church Ministry: Causes of Decline and Changes Needed for Turnaround," *Great Commission Research Journal* 3, no. 2 (2012): 150.

[2] Michael Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2014), 296. Goheen posits that the mission advocates in the nineteenth century observed that the "missionary impulse would result in a reflex action that would rebound back on the sending church in the West, which would in turn reap some benefits of this missionary activity." Goheen notes that these "rebound" benefits were never explored fully because mission at that time was connected to colonialism. However, Goheen exclaims that this "dynamic of reflexive action is increasingly evident" today. Goheen credits a conversation with Wilbert Shenk for the terminology of "blessed reflex" and "reflexive action."

culture in church revitalization will be explored. Specifically, the topics of defining mission versus missions, the missional church conversation, and a cogent theology of mission for church revitalization will be put forward. This overview will show a void in the research concerning how a healthy mission culture positively pushes church revitalization forward.

Need for Church Revitalization

The North American church is at a crossroad. Lesslie Newbigin surmised that Western culture, maybe more than any other, is resistant to the gospel.[3] Not only has Western culture provided alternate answers for life's big questions, but also according to Michael Goheen the most powerful spirit that it has formed is consumerism.[4] Additionally, Steven Miles asserts, "consumerism appears to have become part and parcel of the very fabric of modern life. . . .And the parallel with religion is not an accidental one. Consumerism is . . . arguably *the* religion of the late twentieth century."[5] Jeff Christopherson in his book *Kingdom Matrix* warns that when the materialism of our culture and the Christian sub-culture mix, the church is filled with "self-seekers all polished up and assembled together in one massive brand expanding movement."[6] This is hardly the definition of the church. This self-centered and centripetal view of the church

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[3] Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 3. Russell Moore comments that in America, cultural Christianity has all but evaporated. Russell Moore, *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel* (Nashville: B&H, 2015), 24. While this cultural shift has undoubtedly influenced the decline of the church, Moore does not view this as wholly detrimental to the church. He says, "Those who were nominally Christian are suddenly vanished from the pews. Those who wanted an almost-gospel will find that they don't need it to thrive in American culture." America has ceased to need Christianity or the church to be "America." Moore believes that once the church moves to separate itself from patriotism, Christians will move into a more powerful position to engage the culture of today (252-56). The day has long past where being a Christian would gain one social capital and influence. Christians can no longer fantasize that they are in charge, that they had created a "Christian Culture." See Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014), 16, Kindle.

[4] Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission*, 327.

[5] Steven Miles, *Consumerism: As a Way of Life* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006), 1.

[6] Jeff Christopherson, *Kingdom Matrix* (Boise, ID: Russell Media, 2012), 137.

runs the church head-long into plateau, decline, and impending death.[7] Goheen sees this cultural influence trickling into the church to corrupt the image of the church to one of "a vendor of religious goods and services."[8]

State of the Church

Since the seventeenth century more and more people have discovered that they could ignore God and the church without any perceived repercussions.[9] As early as the 1960s sociologists and missiologists began signaling that church growth was not keeping up with population growth.[10] The perceived growth of the church in America during the 70s, 80s, and 90s had more to do with what Mark Wingfield called, "the circulation of the saints," than conversion growth.[11]

This alteration of the faith landscape has not left the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention unscathed.[12] Albert Mohler points out that the SBC grew "quickly and steadily" when Christianity was a major shaper of culture. The SBC grew steadily when the neighborhoods surrounding the church could gain social capital for joining the

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[7] Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville: B&H, 2007), 65.

[8] Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission*, 306. What has emerged is a religiosity that is "more pluralistic, more individualist, and more private." See Darrell L. Guder, "Missional Church: From Sending to Being Sent," in *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 1, Kindle.

[9] David Bosch, *Believing in the Future: Toward a Missiology of Western Culture* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1992), 15.

[10] Eymann, "Turnaround Church Ministry," 147. Peter Wagner notes that from 1965 to 1975, the Episcopal Church lost 17 percent of its members, the United Presbyterians lost 12 percent, and the United Methodists lost 10 percent. C. Peter Wagner, *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990), 31-32.

[11] Mark Wingfield, "Diagnosis: 52 Percent of SBC Churches Stunted; 18 Percent on List of Critically Ill," *Baptist Standard*, December 12, 1990.

[12] Albert Mohler, "The Future of the Southern Baptist Convention: The Numbers Don't Add Up," May 31, 2019, https://albertmohler.com/2019/05/31/the-future-of-the-southern-baptist-convention-the-numbers-dont-add-up.

church.[13] After four decades of growth, the trajectory of the SBC is most undoubtedly downward.[14]

Changes in culture alone cannot be blamed for the increasing rate of church decline and death. Churches in need of revitalization have contributed to their own decline and demise. Churches who have gotten off the *missio Dei* and become inwardly focused idolize the past, refuse to look like the community, move the budget toward the needs of the congregation, are driven by the preferences of the members, and obsess over the facilities of their church rather than the needs of the community.[15]

Bill Henard, tracing the life cycle of a church, argues that "plateau" is the first step of a church heading toward decline and death.[16] John Worcester states, "It's tragic

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[13] Mohler, "The Future of the Southern Baptist Convention."

[14] Mohler, "The Future of the Southern Baptist Convention." Mohler goes on to list eight lessons that the SBC should pay heed to in order to reverse the downward spiral the denomination is headed down. Mohler also notes that in juxtaposition to the mainline Protestant decline, Southern Baptists have responded to the dire news with calls for more focus on living lives on mission to reach their neighborhoods with the gospel of Christ. Mohler concludes with an exhortation for SBC churches to find an understanding of what faithfulness to Christ should look like for twenty-first century Southern Baptists. While the SBC has almost 3000 more churches than it did a decade ago, it has lost around 1.3 million members since 2006. In that same period, the SBC has baptized 26.5 percent fewer persons. The average SBC church baptizes one individual for every 59 members. SBC churches are not growing significantly through conversion. See Lisa Cannon Green, "Worship Attendance Rises, Baptisms Decline in SBC," Facts & Trends, June 1, 2018, https://factsandtrends.net/2018/06/01/worship-attendance-rises-baptisms-decline-in-sbc/. Admittingly, membership is not the best statistical tool to measure vitality. The SBC is down in every major metric of church health, including attendance and baptisms. Thom Rainer laments, "It's heartbreaking to be baptizing fewer people to Christ, even though Southern Baptist have nearly 2,900 more churches than we had a decade ago." Recorded in Green, "Worship Attendance Rises, Baptisms Decline in the SBC." The SBC is also experiencing a dilemma when it comes to keeping its young. According to Ryan P. Burge, the SBC is going through a generational dilemma. Almost half of SBC kids are leaving the denomination and are not coming back. This, along with declining fertility rates, has influenced the rise of the average age of Southern Baptists from 43.2 in 1984 to 52.7 in 2016. Burge concludes that there is "little reason to believe that the SBC won't sustain serious declines in the next 10-20 years." Ryan P. Burge, "Only Half of Kids Raised Southern Baptist Stay Southern Baptist," *Christianity Today*, May 24, 2019, https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2019/may/southern-baptist-sbc-decline-conversion-retention-gss.html.

[15] Thom Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 11-82. For other factors that lead to decline and death, see Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 19-23; Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 22-29; Thom Rainer, "Why Dying Churches Die," August 9, 2017, https://thomrainer.com/2017/08/dying-churches-die/.

[16] Bill Henard, *Reclaimed Church: How Churches Grow Decline and Experience Revitalization* (Nashville: B&H, 2018), chap. 5, Kindle. Church plateau is "much like hypertension that is called a silent killer by medical professionals." See Gary L. McIntosh, *There's Hope for Your Church: First Steps to Restoring Health and Growth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), 52, Kindle.

that most churches do the opposite of what they are supposed to do. When they start to plateau, rather than to ramp up reproduction, they turn inward and concentrate on their own growth. Churches choose birth control and the exponential advance of the Kingdom ceases."[17] Plateaued churches lose direction, misalign priorities, lose key leaders and staff, try to redefine success, grow older demographically, complicate decision making, and lose focus on the *missio Dei*.[18]

These "drifts toward death" could be summarized and wrapped up in the designation, "the inwardly focused church."[19] Harry Reeder prophetically states that when a church no longer ministers to the surrounding community, it loses its privilege to speak to that community.[20] This inward drift of the church causes the church to become institutionalized, focusing more on programs and forms of ministry that replace spiritual productivity with activity.[21] The church becomes what Lyle Schiller calls a voluntary association church, "by the people, for the people" being led by a group that represents the different factions in order to keep people happy.[22] Many church members have a set of assumptions that they believe the church should operate in, and many of those assumptions are centered on recapturing the past and returning to the "good old days."[23]

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[17] Henard, *Reclaimed Church*, chap. 5.

[18] Henard, *Reclaimed Church*, chap. 5.

[19] Thom Rainer, "Established Churches and Inward Drift," November 26, 2012, https://thomrainer.com/2012/11/established_churches_and_inward_drift/. While this article is about established churches, the principles generalize to most churches. Win Arn concludes that many churches begin a plateau or decline in the fifteenth or eighteenth year of ministry. See Win Arn, *The Pastor's Manual for Effective Ministry* (Monrovia, CA: Church Growth, 1988), 45.

[20] Harry Reeder, *From Embers to Flame: How God Can Revitalize Your Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 197.

[21] Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 19-20.

[22] Lyle Schiller, *Activating the Passive Church: Diagnosis and Treatment* (Abingdon, MD: Abingdon Press, 1981), 126.

[23] Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, James H. Furr, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 10.

As the church turns inward, it frenetically concentrates on its own growth, while choosing the "sterility of 'saving itself' over the exponential advance of the kingdom of God."[24] The church becomes irrelevant to the pursuit of spiritual and life transformation.[25] The church pushes back against the community and growth because they do not want to lose "the vibe" of what they are experiencing at the moment; if the church is good enough for the members it should be good enough for the community.[26] These churches desire for the community to change, while they stay the same.[27] The inwardly focused church pines for the "status quo."[28] As the church plateaus, most congregants either latch on to nostalgia or embrace an attitude of questioning.[29] Ed Stetzer has famously said, "nostalgia is a cul-de-sac to nowhere."[30]

Biblical Basis for Church Revitalization

Christ promised in Matthew 16:18 that he would build his church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it. However, thousands of churches each year will shutter their doors, sell their property, and lose a gospel witness in the community in which they once ministered.[31] Jeff Christopherson sharply concludes, "Local churches are

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[24] Jeff Christopherson, foreword to *Reclaiming Glory*, xvi.

[25] J. R. Woodward and Dan White Jr., *The Church as Movement: Starting and Sustaining Missional-Incarnational Communities* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2016), 26.

[26] Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 21-22.

[27] Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 16.

[28] Sam Rainer, "Why the Status Quo Is So Tempting (And Dangerous)," April 20, 2015, https://samrainer.com/2015/04/why-the-status-quo-is-so-tempting-and-dangerous/. Rainer describes the "status quo church" as opposing growth, discouraging risk, opposed to change, and inclined to complacency. The status quo attitude is a highly contagious attitude that can thwart the church from accomplishing its mission.

[29] Henard, *Reclaimed Church*, chap. 5.

[30] Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 19. Clifton notes that he has heard Stetzer say this in multiple times in multiple venues.

[31] Brian Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying and Divided Churches* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016), 15.

temporary, they have a life cycle, a shelf life. No doubt many have long exceeded that shelf life and still operate under the designation of church, but have long ceased to operate within the constraints of God's Kingdom."[32] However in Revelation 2-3, Jesus shows his heart for healthy, vibrant, and growing churches by both encouraging health and pushing for spiritual revitalization.[33] When the bride of Christ is in distress, Christ calls the shepherds of the church to edify, build up, and strengthen the church.[34] Christ alone owns the church and desires to beautify his church for his pleasure and glory.[35]

Gary McIntosh encourages pastors to see that God has a desire for churches to "be fruitful and multiply."[36] McIntosh observes hints of the Genesis 1:28 cultural mandate pattern of health and growth in the report of Acts 12:24 that "the word of the Lord increased and multiplied."[37] McIntosh believes that the disciples would have caught the implication from Luke that churches are to "grow and multiply across the world as new believers accept the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ."[38]

Andrew Davis points out that church revitalization accomplishes the goal of Ephesians 1:4 to make sinners holy.[39] Several church revitalization writers see Ezekiel's vision of "Valley of the Dry Bones" as a legitimate picture of God breathing new life into

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[32] Christopherson, *Kingdom Matrix*, 50. Christopherson believes that the church is not the goal of the kingdom of God but a tool to advance the kingdom. The church either builds the kingdom of God or reduces it.

[33] Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 1.

[34] Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 2.

[35] Andrew M. Davis, *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 49.

[36] McIntosh, *There's Hope for Your Church*, 21. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from the English Standard Version (ESV).

[37] McIntosh, *There's Hope for Your Church*, 21

[38] McIntosh, *There's Hope for Your Church*, 22.

[39] Davis, *Revitalize*, 63.

dying individuals and churches.[40] Church revitalization is the process of joining God's activity, God's assignment, in God's time.[41] The process takes struggling people and congregations and transforms them through remembering the promises of God for his church, and repenting of attitudes that have stifled the Holy Spirit's work.[42] God is calling church leaders to refurbish the ruins of his house into a colony of heaven that has a serious gospel impact in the local community.[43] The local church must be a gospel community that pushes against the inward inertia of selfish preference. It must push outward, partnered with the *missio Dei* through their union with Christ.

Approaches to Church Revitalization

Since the term "church revitalization" came on the scene in the early 1970's there have been many different approaches to defining and attempting revitalization.[44] Joseph Stephen Hudson notes that the terms "replant," "revival," and "renewal" are often used as synonyms for revitalization.[45] Revitalization is a spiritual process.[46] However, the differentiation of definitions generally depends on the approach and goal of the specific

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[40] Davis, *Revitalize*, 31. See also Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 13-15; Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 23-33; Bill Henard, *Can These Bones Live? A Practical Guide to Church Revitalization* (Nashville: B&H, 2015), 1-2.

[41] Ed Stetzer and Thom Rainer, *Transformational Church: Creating a New Scorecard for Congregations* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 51-53.

[42] Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 14. Albert Mohler laments that millions of Christians are living out their lives in "declining and decaying congregations." These Christians represent an "army" of servants for God that need a "visionary, courageous, and convictional leader to offer them a healthy environment to utilize their gifts and wirings." R. Albert Mohler Jr., "Christ Will Build and Rebuild His Church: The Need for 'Generational Replant,'" in *A Guide to Church Revitalization*, ed. R. Albert Mohler Jr. (Louisville, KY: SBTS Press, 2015), 9.

[43] Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 13-14.

[44] Joseph Stephen Hudson, "A Competency Model for Church Revitalization in Southern Baptist Convention Churches: A Mixed Methods Study" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 21.

[45] Hudson, "A Competency Model," 22.

[46] McIntosh, *There's Hope for Your Church*, 59.

author. Revitalization is "a complex phenomenon" that is difficult to define.[47] Some authors approach revitalization from a church health standpoint, while other authors focus both on health, practical leadership, and ministry practices that could aid in revitalization.[48] The author's "theological bent" and ecclesiological approach generally bring much to bear on the their chosen "genre" of revitalization.[49] Here are the common approaches and themes of revitalization that are found throughout the literature.

Church health approach to revitalization. According to a study done by the Leavell Center for Evangelism and Church Health at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in 2010, only 6.8 percent of SBC churches are healthy.[50] Church leaders must embark on a journey towards revitalization to restore their church to the health required to partner in *missio De*i ministry. Davis in *Revitalize* defines revitalization as the "effort to restore by biblical means a once healthy church from a present level of disease to a present state of spiritual health, as defined by the Word of God."[51] Croft gives a similar health based definition of revitalization when he writes, "a church is revitalized by the

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[47] Hudson, "A Competency Model," 29-30.

[48] For a sampling of literature geared toward the biblical approach to revitalization see Brian Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying and Divided Churches* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016, Andrew M. Davis, *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), and Harry Reeder, *From Embers to Flame: How God Can Revitalize Your Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008. For the principled approach see Thom Rainer's collection of resources at https://churchanswers.com/ and Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville: B&H, 2007).

[49] Hudson, "A Competency Model," 29.

[50] Kevin Ezell, "Breathing New Life into Dying Churches," in Mohler, *A Guide to Church Revitalization*, 14.

[51] Davis, *Revitalize*, 20. Because Davis believes it is God alone who gives life, he focuses his attention on helping pastors produce health and not growth in their churches (38). Davis relies on Mark Dever for a prescription and metric of health. See Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013). Dever suggests that the nine marks of church health are (1) expositional preaching, (2) biblical theology, (3) the gospel, (4) a biblical understanding of conversion, (5) a biblical understanding of evangelism, (6) a biblical understanding of church memberships, (7) a biblical understanding of church discipline, (8) a concern for discipleship and growth, and (9) biblical church leadership.

power of God through the Spirit of God at work through the word of God by means of a faithful shepherd of God."[52]

Davis is critical of authors and church leaders who in his view "prooftext" secular leadership books on visionary leadership or other pragmatic principles.[53] Croft calls these approaches the "pragmatist approach" to revitalization.[54] Reeder posits that revitalization is not a "program to plug and play, but are principles that are God designed to bring life back to the church."[55] In a way, for Reeder, revitalization is a "biblical fitness plan."[56]

Christopherson proclaims, "Whenever we focus on the goals over the integrity of the process, we will always be tempted to produce the fruit ourselves. God expands his kingdom."[57] According to these authors the vision for revitalization should come exclusively from the redemptive plan of God, holiness of God, nature of a healthy

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[52] Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 24

[53] Davis, *Revitalize*, 107. For example, Davis states that church leaders should view the Scriptures as sufficient for a model of church leadership. See Andrew M. Davis, "Leading the Church in Today's World: What It Means Practically to Shepherd God's Flock," in *Shepherding God's Flock*, ed. Benjamin Merkle and Thomas Schreiner (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 314.

[54] Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 16. Croft admonishes some revitalizers who he feels attempt to "seek to revive and grow a dying church through clever gimmicks and appealing programs that work to bring about specific, desired results." He sees church leaders relying on "numbers based" evangelistic efforts that rely heavily on the giftedness and appeal of man. He sees these efforts valuing success rather than faithfulness. In fairness, Croft also exhorts those who would base their revitalization efforts solely on "a strict adherence to biblical principles based in God's word." He warns that these efforts generally express themselves in a very narrow expression of worship and church. These revitalizers may shun anything that appears as worldly or entertaining. While this narrow view of revitalization claims to hold to biblical primacy, it actually clings to rigid legalism. Croft argues for what he calls the "biblical approach." Croft summarizes his approach as "resting its full weight on the truth that God's Spirit working through His world is the only way to bring true lasting spiritual life to a local church. And yet it also values the truth that is good and right of the bride of Christ to look beautiful and appealing to God's people and even to intrigue those who are hostile to Christ in the world" (17).

[55] Reeder, *From Embers to Flame*, 9. Reeder sees that the literature has "been marked by pragmatism, seemingly to promote conformity to the world more than connecting to the world." Reeder believes that while helpful tools can be unearthed, various revitalization models seem to rely too heavily on "Wall Street or Hollywood." For Reeder, the biblical church revitalization plan can only be found in the Word of God (27-28).

[56] Reeder, *From Embers to Flame*, 30.

[57] Christopherson, *Kingdom Matrix*, 62.

church, and the future of heaven.[58] The specific methods of revitalization should be contextual to the community of the local church, but the basic principles of the Bible can be applied anywhere.[59]

These authors believe that as the church returns to health, it should grow numerically.[60] However, not all church growth is healthy. There are contexts where it is possible for a healthy church to not see much numerical growth, and thus the church should aim for recovery and health, not growth.[61] As the church leaders "uproot plants" or traditions that God did not plant, the church leader can admonish the remaining believers to be obedient to the heavenly vision of the local church to be partnered in the *missio Dei* through their union with Christ.[62]

Principle approach to church revitalization. Some revitalizers approach church transformation through emphasizing certain principles of an effective church.[63] Many of these principles are found within the pages of Scripture, but proponents of the

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[58] Davis, *Revitalize*, 108-9. The church leader's vision should also include the specific sins and opportunities that are the church is facing. The visionary church leader must look to Christ instead of using self-reliance and vision as driving factors of the revitalization (106, 110). Even though these leaders minimize the reliance on social science to aid in revitalization, they still allude to leadership examples and principles that are not found in Scripture. For example, when talking about change leadership, Davis puts forward General Douglas MacArthur as an exemplar to follow. He also promotes a saying by Charles Spurgeon that encourages pastors to have "one deaf ear, and one blind eye" to the things that need to change.

[59] Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 12.

[60] Reeder, *From Embers to Flame*, 29. Almost all revitalization literature begins with this premise. Stetzer and Rainer conclude that where there has been a significant gospel change in the hearts of congregation, there has been overall broader change in the community. See Stetzer and Rainer, *Transformational Church*, 13.

[61] Reeder, *From Embers to Flame*, 29. Reeder notes that just as the size of the human body does not correlate with health, neither should the church (32).

[62] Davis, *Revitalize*, 53-54. Henard concludes that it is amazing to see what happens when congregants become "right with God." See Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 57.

[63] Church revitalization is dependent on both "tangible and intangible" facets of the church. See Jeffrey C. Farmer, "Church Planting Sponsorship: A Statistical Analysis of Sponsoring a Church Plant as a Means of Revitalization of the Sponsor Church" (PhD diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007), 19.

principle approach to church revitalization have appropriated helpful principles and practices from the social sciences.[64] Henard defines church revitalization as "the process by which the church learns to embrace the changes necessary to get it back on and keep it on a growth plane."[65] The following sections will detail the goals and characteristics that these authors are pushing church leaders toward.[66]

The first principled approach to revitalization is to create a culture of uncomplicated discipleship. Churches needing revitalization have an unhealthy propensity and penchant for programs that are mostly inwardly focused.[67] These program focused churches emphasize the form and method of ministry to create a church that has much activity but chokes out gospel productivity a majority of the time.[68] Healthy church leaders intentionally design discipleship pathways that are obvious for everyone in the church.[69] These church leaders "focused on the end result" and "overall picture" of

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[64] By social science, I mean the study of leadership, organizational change, organizational culture, guest services, marketing, and other areas. John David Trentham advocates that observations and insights provided by social science "may be constructively engaged as legitimate descriptions of temporal realities" that are deciphered due to the image of God inherent to all humanity. Those holding to the church-health model generally hold a "polemic" view of the social science, while those holding the principle approach generally appropriate some level of social science in the church. John David Trentham, "Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 1): Engaging and Appropriating Models of Human Development," *Christian Education Journal* 16, no. 3 (October 2019): 470. See also John David Trentham "Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 2): Engaging and Appropriating Models of Human Development," *Christian Education Journal* 16, no. 3 (October 2019): 476-94.

[65] Henard, *Reclaimed Church*, chap. 5. The changes that Henard is speaking of are not just the aims of the revitalizer but also the characteristics of a revitalized church.

[66] Some authors would say that there is a statistical approach to revitalization. For instance, Stetzer and Dodson define revitalization as a church that experienced a five-year period of plateau or decline in which the church grew less than 10 percent during this five-year period. That period was followed by a period of two to five years of significant growth of at least a 10 percent increase in attendance each year and a member to baptism ration of 35:1. Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, xiii. While the statistical approach is helpful because it is measurable, authors like Stetzer and Dodson advocate for the principal approach in order to reach the statistical benchmarks.

[67] Reeder, *From Embers to Flame*, 9. Reeder states that dying churches latch onto programs like a gambler, hoping that the program is the "winning ticket" that will turn their church around.

[68] Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 19-20. Business becomes an analgesic to numb the pain of church decline as well as a "great disguise" for the lack of real life. Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples* (Nashville: B&H, 2011), 40.

[69] Rainer and Geiger, *Simple Church*, 49.

discipleship for the individual.[70] Revitalizers must make the church's discipleship process clear and commit to removing other "clutter" that becomes an obstacle for true spiritual growth and engagement.[71] Declining churches must resist the temptation to find their identification in their programmatic structure and focus their new identity on a missional vision of making disciples that make disciples.[72]

The second principled approach to revitalization is convictional, bold leadership. No church leader can actualize revitalization alone.[73] The leadership that is required for revitalization is "incredibly difficult."[74] Dan Eymann surmises that in revitalization, leadership is everything.[75] Dying, inwardly focused churches are led by leaders who are unintentional.[76] Christopherson acknowledges that in revitalization, the leader is often "one person standing alone, resolute, and determined to resist the baser demands in order to accomplish something of eternal significance. This kind of leadership looks beyond self-interest toward something greater, often at great personal cost."[77] Many times, the revitalizer enters a situation where the leadership of the church is

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[70] Rainer and Geiger, *Simple Church*, 50.

[71] Rainer and Geiger, *Simple Church*, 50. In fact, a study by Travis H. Bradshaw at the University of Florida showed that churches with more programing options grew less than those with fewer offered. Travis H. Bradshaw, "Evangelistic Churches: Geographic, Demographic, and Marketing Variables That Facilitate Their Growth" (PhD diss., University of Florida, 2001), 112.

[72] Henard, *Reclaimed Church*, chap. 8.

[73] Davis, *Revitalize*, 175. Davis, to his credit, spends much time discussing his revitalizing practice of cultivating discipleship among men. However, Davis gives little space for the development of women in the church. If the church is going to reach the whole community, ample opportunities must be present to develop women in a healthy complementarian environment. See Kadi Cole, *Developing Female Leaders: Navigate the Minefields and Release the Potential of Women in Your Church* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2019).

[74] Christopherson, *Kingdom Matrix*, 126. A profile of the types of leadership traits that are required are discussed later in this chapter.

[75] Eymann, "Turnaround Church Ministry," 154.

[76] Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 20.

[77] Christopherson, *Kingdom Matrix*, 126-27.

in ruins.[78] The leader must view these remnant believers as the "foundation or scaffolding" from which to base the revitalization effort.[79] Davis concludes that in order for successful revitalization to take place, God must raise up "Spirit filled, visionary, passionate, capable young men."[80]

While the vision required to revitalize a church must be a "together" vision, God usually raises up "a point person" to paint a compelling picture that captures the heart and imagination of whom God is enlisting to transform his church.[81] The leader must help other church leaders see what does not exist and enlighten them to the better future that God desires for their church.[82] Momentum is built as people adopt the church's mission as their own and begin to live out the mission in their everyday lives.[83]

While the revitalization leader should remain open to practical tools and methods learned from the best practices of other revitalizers, Clifton exhorts that if a church leader relies on pragmatics alone to motivate the congregation to change the members will "bail" on the revitalization when the pain of change becomes too high.[84] Ultimately the leader must remember that as a "shepherd" he must fulfill his God-given role as a protector, provider, and guide of their congregation.[85] Christ is the ultimate exemplar for the revitalizer to follow as the "Great Shepherd (who) 'pitched his tent'

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[78] Davis, *Revitalize*, 175-76.

[79] Reeder, *From Embers to Flame*, 33-36.

[80] Davis, *Revitalize*, 32.

[81] Andy Stanley, *Visioneering: God's Blueprint for Developing and Maintaining Personal Vision* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 1999), 85.

[82] Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 50.

[83] Henard, *Reclaimed Church*, chap. 2. Churches that have a structure built around a clear strategy for ministry are growing 50 percent faster than those that do not (chap. 15).

[84] Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 9. Clifton also notes that the pain of change will always become too high for those who are not bought into the more biblical and effective vision of the church leader.

[85] Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2006), 247.

among us and showed us how to live and die for those sheep who recognize his name."[86]

The third principled approach to revitalization is bold preaching and engaging worship service environment. The pastor and his preaching are paramount to revitalization in order to call the church back to mission. Thom Rainer states that preaching that "truly teaches the Bible in its original context is a major factor in reaching the unchurched."[87]

However, the preaching and worship experience must be done with the community in mind. The worship, verbiage, and preaching to the revitalized church should be "seeker sensible."[88] Rainer exhorts pastors through the teaching of The Apostle Paul to conduct services in a way that "non-believers would be affected positively."[89] Congregations should not hold "white knuckled" to their preference of music but should look to the community and the future of the church when making stylistic decisions.[90] The worship of the church must be indigenous to the culture, "taking root in the soil and appropriately reflecting the culture" of the surrounding neighborhoods in order to reach

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[86] Laniak, S*hepherds after My Own Heart*, 251.

[87] Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 58. Mark Clifton and Kenneth Priest claim that for revitalization, preaching is paramount: "You'll need to pray, evangelize, serve the community, make disciples, and everything else you're reading about in this book. All of that flows from effectual preaching of God's Word." Mark Clifton and Kenneth Priest, *Rubicons of Revitalization: Overcoming 8 Common Barriers to Church Renewal* (Littleton, CO: Acoma Press, 2018), 31. David E. Prince concurs and adds that "while genuine church revitalization certainly involves more than preaching, it can never bypass or minimize the pulpit. Preaching is God's chosen medium and it will never go out of date." David E. Prince, "Lead from the Front: The Priority of Expository Preaching," in *A Guide to Church Revitalization*, ed. R. Albert Mohler Jr. (Louisville, KY: SBTS Press, 2015), 32. In a declining church, Christ has become a means to an end. Christ-centered, exalting preaching helps members find themselves and their church in the greater story of Christ and his kingdom and mission (37).

[88] Davis, *Revitalize*, 190.

[89] Thom S. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth* (Nashville: B&H, 1993), 225. Stephen Macchia notes that people are longing for worship services that "engage and require their full involvement." Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church: 10 Traits of Vital Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 44.

[90] Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church*, 52.

them.[91]

The fourth principled approach to revitalization is to coach church members to live on mission. For too long churches have expected their community to make their way to them. Revitalizers must realize that their church is full of people who are called to ministry and are waiting to be sent on mission. Congregants need to move beyond "sitting and soaking" to "learning and living out the gospel."[92] Believers are part of a movement to take the name of Christ, which is alive and dynamic.[93] Shifting the focus of the congregation outward to the community can be effective in breaking the sinful patterns of the inwardly focused church. Revitalization leaders can raise expectations for members to keep the responsibility of the mission of the church in front of them.[94]

Revitalizing churches push the focus off their facilities, and they place their attention on offering biblical community that influences the lost.[95] Revitalization leaders must coach their members not to focus exclusively on their own spiritual maturity and preferences but to focus their hearts collectively on serving their neighborhood.[96] These church leaders create a culture of evangelism that is both spontaneous and planned.[97] Revitalization leaders realize that it takes the whole church to reach the community and to develop outreach opportunities to create open doors for the community to initiate

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[91] Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 1. The church must do everything that it can to make worship and preaching "intelligible" to the neighborhoods surrounding the church. J. D. Greear, *Gaining by Losing: Why the Future Belongs to Churches That Send* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 88.

[92] Stetzer and Rainer, *Transformational Church*, 54.

[93] Reeder, *From Embers to Flame*, 44.

[94] Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 141. Servant evangelism can be an effective tool in pushing members out into the community. Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 190.

[95] Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 6.

[96] Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 67-68. Missional priorities is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

[97] Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 105.

relationships with the church.[98] Church revitalizers must begin to view themselves as more than Bible communicators; they must own the mandate given in Ephesians 4:11-13 to become people developers.[99] In order to revitalize, churches must become more than "entertainment centers for the lukewarm" and instead training centers where disciples that can make more disciples of Christ are formed.[100] Churches must move from being centers of teaching, to centers of training in order to help push their people out to mission.[101]

Transforming the Mission Church Culture

Church revitalization that is accomplished through mission culture requires attentive, gospel-infused leadership. Revitalization leaders often jump to conclusions about how to make their church work better or develop missional strategy without asking the right questions.[102] Creating a biblical mission culture is more than adding outwardly focused programs to the busy church schedule. Many church leaders attempt to "cut and paste" initiatives from "successful" churches and hope for the same success.[103] In order to cultivate a culture of "sentness" that flows from the heart of God and the *missio Dei*, revitalization leaders must become deft cultural exegetes and change agents. This next section will define and paint a portrait of what culture is and how revitalization leaders

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[98] Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 103, 105.

[99] Will Mancini, "5 Reasons Why Disciples Need Ministry Tools More Than Sermons," August 13, 2019, https://www.willmancini.com/blog/5-reasons-why-disciples-need-ministry-tools-more-than-sermons. In light of the pressing need, the evidence of research, and the conviction of the Scripture, the church can no longer afford to separate discipleship and leadership development. See Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Developmen*t (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 164.

[100] Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 117.

[101] Mancini, "Why Disciples Need Ministry Tools."

[102] J. R. Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture: Equipping the Church for the Sake of the World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2012), 27, Kindle.

[103] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 102.

can gain tools to affect their church culture to push for a surge of outward focus connected to the *missio Dei* that in turn reverberates back to the church in health and growth.

Church Culture

According to Kevin Peck, "Culture is a critical component of any human institution, including the church."[104] A church culture is formed through the actual beliefs the church has about creation, the identity of the local church, and how the church postures itself to the surrounding community.[105] Kevin Peck defines church culture as

> a set of tacit assumptions (both biblical and unbiblical) shared by a local congregation as it attempts to flourish according to God's will, addressing both external interaction and internal cooperation, that is considered to be true, and therefore is taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to God's design and purpose for the individual, the local church, and the world.[106]

These cultural layers make a local congregation unique.[107] Every local church has its own cultural fingerprint and DNA that differentiates it as a unique expression of God's kingdom.[108] Every church is a "unique combination of people"; no two churches are the

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[104] Kevin Jamie Peck, "Examining a Church Culture of Multiplication: A Multiple Case Study" (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), 6.

[105] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 103.

[106] Peck, "Examining a Church Culture of Multiplication," 1. This is an adaption of Edgar Schein's definition of organizational culture. Schein's definition of culture is found in Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2017), 18. According to Raymond Williams, culture is one of the three most complicated words in the English language. See Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 76. The word "culture" etymologically comes from a Latin word that means to "till, cultivate, or tend." See Tony Bennet, Lawrence Grossberg, and Meagan Morris, *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 64-65.

[107] Malphurs, *Look Before You Lead: How to Discern & Shape Your Church Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 18. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr speak of church culture as a "mental model." While their definition of a "mental model" is more axiological than ontological, they attempt to diagnose the culture of a church through these terms. See Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 113-27.

[108] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 134

same.[109] This unique church culture is "intensely potent."[110] Church culture cannibalizes strategic planning and programming, thus revitalization leaders must be savvy at diagnosing and cultivating it.[111] This unique cultural DNA determine ministry distinctives that should be developed from an understanding of the mission of the church found in the *missio Dei*.[112]

Wherever we find stubborn sticking points in church culture, there will be deeply held assumptions, beliefs, and values that are incompatible with the desired outcome, behavior, and direction of the leader.[113] "Unhealthy church culture is a theological problem."[114] There is often a large disparity between what church members and leaders believe and what they say.[115] The mission of the church slowly dies as the church widens the gap between what they say they believe and what they actually live out.[116]

However, church culture cultivation and stewardship is as important as ever as the dominant culture seeks to squeeze the church into the mold of the "market."[117] If the church hopes to fulfill its mission in partnership with the *missio Dei*, revitalization leaders must develop a culture in the congregation that encourages people to live for the

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[109] Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 153.

[110] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 125.

[111] Malphurs, *Look Before You Lead*, 14, 44.

[112] Malphurs, *Look Before You Lead*, 28.

[113] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 128.

[114] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 102. If this culture is not healthy, it does not matter how smart the individuals of the organization are or how great of a product they have to sell—the organization is doomed. Patrick Lencioni, *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything in Business* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 5.

[115] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 134.

[116] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 130.

[117] Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture*, 32.

sake of the world, without being of the world.[118] The church leader must move beyond "name it claim it" methods of change to a deep difficult investment of time to change the collective DNA of the entire group of people that make up the local church.[119] J.D. Woodward proclaims that in order to form culturally mature congregations, the American church needs "missional equippers who live as cultural architects, with a heightened sense of contextual awareness and the ability to shape and cultivate culture in the congregation."[120]

Change is indeed difficult for any organization, especially the church. If the revitalization leader is going to bring about the cultural changes needed to partner with the *missio Dei*, they must work strenuously and deftly to carry out their Holy Spirit-infused plan. The next section will bring forward from the literature how a church leader can shepherd cultural change in their church to create a culture of mission.

Shepherding Church Culture Change

Thomas Peters concludes, "It is easier to kill an organization than to change it."[121] This makes real planned change that affects an organization rare, usually not

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[118] Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture*, 32.

[119] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 134.

[120] Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture*, 61.

[121] Thomas J. Peters, *Re-Imagine: Business Excellence in a Disruptive Age* (New York: Dorling Kindersley, 2006), 32. Even when faced with the prospect of death, some people would rather cling to the "status quo" than adjust or push for a new way of life. There is a widely circulated story that discusses change in the lifestyles of people needing heart bypass surgery. These patients are told that they must change their diet and lifestyle, or they could face impending death. Sadly, 90 percent of people still refuse to change. See Alan Deutschman, *Change or Die: The Three Keys to Change at Work and in Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 4-6. However, change is a necessary part of a thriving organization. Organizations must abandon the concept of continuity in order to survive and thrive. See Richard Foster and Richard Foster and Sarah Kaplan, *Creative Destruction: Why Companies That Are Built to Last Underperform the Market and How to Successfully Transform Them* (New York: Currency, 2001), 15. For helpful models of people's response to change, see Malphurs, *Look Before You Lead*, 116-19; William Bridges, "Managing Organizational Transitions," *Organizational Dynamics* 15, no. 1 (1996): 25; Everett Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 5th ed. (New York: Free Press, 2003), 281-94; Thom S. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit: Leading Change in the Church* (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 130.

significant, and prone to failure.[122] Most change initiative despite the goal or content, generally produce only "lukewarm" results.[123] Continual change is not a natural condition in life, which leads most people to resist.[124]

Leadership, according to Schein, is responsible for creating, cultivating, and managing the culture of the organization.[125] Lyle Schaller writes that "one of the more highly visible methods of intervention in congregational life is the appearance of the skilled, persuasive, respected, influential, and effective leader who has a vision of a new and different tomorrow, and can persuasively communicate that vision to others."[126] Hudson in his study of revitalization leaders notes that establishing a mission focus for

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[122] W. Warren Burke, *Organizational Change: Theory and Practice* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2018), 1, 9. Ray Kurzweil believes that those living through the twenty-first century will experience the equivalent of 20,000 years of progress. See Ray Kurzweil, "The Law of Accelerating Returns," in *Alan Turing: Life and Legacy of a Great Thinker*, ed. Christof Teuscher (Berlin: Springer, 2004), 381.

[123] John P. Kotter, "Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail," in *HBR's 10 Must Reads on Change Management* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2011), 5.

[124] Connie J. G. Gersick, "Revolutionary Change Theories: A Multilevel Exploration of the Punctuated Equilibrium Paradigm," *Academy of Management Review* 16, no. 1 (1991): 16. However, equilibrium is a precursor for the death of an organization. Richard T. Pascale, Mark Milleman, and Linda Gioja, *Surfing the Edge of Chaos: The Laws of Nature and the New Laws of Business* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000), 25.

[125] Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 14-15. In 1993, Joseph Rost found 221 definitions of leadership in the over 587 publications that he examined. Joseph C. Rost, *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), 44. Burke defines organizational change in these terms: ". . . to turn the organization in another direction, to fundamentally modify the 'way we do things,' to overhaul the structure—the design of the organization for decision making and accountability—and to provide organizational members with a whole new vision for the future." Burke, *Organizational Change*, 9. Bridges sees two different kinds of change occurring in organizations. Organization change that is considered revolutionary is described as a "jolt" to the organizational system. These types of changes generally involve a change of mission or another core cultural component that fundamentally alters the organization. In these types of change efforts, the organization will never be the same. These types of revolutionary change generally occur from an "outside intruder," such as a merger or acquisition. Burke's other category of change is labeled evolutionary change. Evolutionary change makes up around 95 percent of all change in an organization. Most organizational change involves improvements or incremental steps to fix a problem or alter a part of the larger system. Burke, *Organizational Change*, 77-79. Instead of evolutionary change, Wanda Orlikowski, Karl Weick, and Robert Quinn have named this type of change "continuous." Wanda S. Orlikowski, "Improvising Organizational Transformation over Time: A Situated Change Perspective," *Information Systems Research* 7, no. 1 (1996): 63-92; Karl E. Weick and Robert E. Quinn, "Organizational Change and Development," *Annual Review of Psychology* 50 (1999): 361-86. For Weick and Quinn, continuous change occurs when "small adjustments simultaneously across units, can cumulate and create substantial change" (375).

[126] Lyle Schaller, *Create Your Own Future: Alternatives for the Long-Range Planning Committee* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 24-25.

the church was one of the first actions that leaders initiated.[127] Every leader Hudson interviewed "recounted an event related to establishing missional focus as one of their critical incidents."[128] These leaders focus on transforming the culture of mission at their church and out of that transformation were able to see mission strategy formed and meaningful missional practices developed in their community.[129] Shaping culture does not just consist of "changing staff, worship style, logos, programs, or even the name of the church…Church culture must be shaped and changed with prayerfulness, in community with other godly leaders, and with great intentionality."[130]

Managing culture is a great and weighty pastoral responsibility.[131] Church experts propose several models and principles to aid the church leader in transforming the mission culture of the local church to participate fully in the *missio Dei*.[132] The literature provides priorities that aid in cultivating a culture of mission.[133]

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[127] Hudson, "A Competency Model," 152.

[128] Hudson, "A Competency Model," 152.

[129] Hudson, "A Competency Model," 152.

[130] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 149.

[131] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 130.

[132] The most successful instances of change usually involve a process that goes through a series of phases. Any skipping of phases only gives the illusion of speed and never produces a "satisfying result." Many change leaders make a crucial mistake in skipping steps in order to speed up the change process. See Kotter, "Leading Change," 1. Any discussion of the process of change must begin with the work of Kurt Lewin. While many flow charts, graphs, and step-by-step procedures exist in change literature today, their "commonality shows the influence of Lewin." See Donald R. Sanders, "Transforming the Leadership Development Culture in Church Revitalizations: A Mixed Methods Study" (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019), 42. To find an overview of the change dynamics noted in the literature, see Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 323; Malphurs, *Look Before You Lead*, 147; Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 13; Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit*, vii-viii; Kurt Lewin, "Frontiers in Group Dynamics: Concept, Method and Reality in Social Science; Social Equilibria and Social Change," *Human Relations* 1, no. 1 (June 1947): 35; John Kotter, *The Heart of Change: Real-Life Stories of How People Change Their Organizations* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 7.

[133] For this section, Geiger and Peck's managing church culture model was used as a rubric. Geiger and Peck give the following model: (1) assessment, (2) vision, (3) exposition, (4) illustration, (5) incorporation, and (6) evaluation. Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 142. Woodward encourages church leaders to cultivate five types of environments in the local church in order to create a culture of mission. Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture*, 46-52. The first environment is the learning environment. Woodward sees this environment as an active environment where people immediately use knowledge and experience the benefit (46). The second is the healing environment. This environment helps individuals

The first priority for the revitalization leader is to assess the current church culture. The church leader cannot will culture into place. To understand the baseline for where the local church culture is, leaders must assess where their church culture is in its current state.[134] All churches have cultural inconsistencies, values that the church claims they believe, but do not live out in their behavior.[135] The church leader's duty is to approach his church's culture as a doctor, trying to excise harmful tissue that impedes healthy culture formation.[136] Geiger and Peck encourage revitalization leaders to "starve and confront" the unhealthy values and feed and "affirm" the healthy values and right beliefs.[137]

Part of this assessment should consist of the revitalization leader assessing his own spiritual state. Herrington et. al. point to biblical examples of Moses and Nehemiah as proof that spiritual leaders must prepare their hearts for the spiritual battle they face ahead.[138] Revitalization leaders attempting to change culture must (1) practice spiritual disciplines, (2) revisit God's mission for the church, (3) conduct an honest self-assessment, (4) be accountable, (5) proactively address problems, and (6) find the right pace.[139] The leader must ensure a correct posture to discern "God's voice and direction"

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find acceptance and healing that leads to a cultivation of true community (48). The third is a welcoming environment. Hospitality must and should become part of the fabric of the church because God is a welcoming God (49). The fourth is a liberating environment. In this environment, an atmosphere is created where Spirit-transforming community leads people to overcome personal and social sin (51). The fifth environment is a thriving environment. In this environment, strong discipleship happens, and people are encouraged to live out their calling with great passion (52).

[134] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 142.

[135] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 134.

[136] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 131.

[137] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 143.

[138] Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 30. Clifton tells prospective church replanters, "You can expect significant spiritual attack and deep, dark depression." Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 144. This phase of personal preparation is vital for the long-term viability of the revitalization leader.

[139] Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 31-33.

for the church.[140]

The second priority in changing church culture and cultivating a new healthy culture is casting a vision for what a healthy church culture looks like.[141] The leader must decrease anxiety that leads to change barriers, and lead in a way that raises an urgency to move out of the current state.[142] This vision will help the church rally around what ministry will have the most impact on the "Kingdom in the context of a local body of believers."[143] This vision must move from inwardly focused to honing in on reaching the community with the gospel.[144] This vision casting should include conviction and confrontation of sin, as well as an opening of the heart to what God would have for the local church.[145] During this vision process, church leaders should resist resorting to mere pragmatics. Instead they should be "brave cultural leaders. . .painting wonderful pictures" of what future obedience to God looks like in the local church.[146] The leader must involve a larger group of people in the change process. Research shows that when a group of people makes a decision that affects a larger group of people without their input, the chances of successful implementation of that change is severely diminished.[147]

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[140] Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 34.

[141] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 143. Kotter explains that in order for change to begin to initiate, around 75 percent of the organization's management must honestly believe that "business as usual" is no longer acceptable. Most leaders "grossly" underestimate the effort it takes to create the correct temperature of urgency and, consequently, move too quickly once they convince a small portion of the organization that change is needed. Kotter, "Leading Change," 5, 7. Many times, leaders must break through the mental barrier that some members maintain by having the members of the organization not just see numbers but also experience the problems firsthand. See W. Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne, "Tipping Point Leadership," in *HBR's 10 Must Reads on Change Management* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2011), 81.

[142] Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 323.

[143] Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 51.

[144] Eymann, "Turnaround Church Ministry," 158.

[145] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 143; Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 51.

[146] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 143.

[147] Burke, *Organizational Change*, 115. When building and sharing a compelling vision for change, Kotter suggests going after the emotions of the other members with almost "smellable" evidence,

The third priority of changing church culture is the leader relying on Scripture and providing a Godly example of ideal culture for the congregation. Geiger and Peck exhort revitalization leaders to rely on the God's word to shape and change the hearts of those they are trying to lead.[148] God's word has the power to change the "presuppositions . . .foundational beliefs, and. . . core identities" of those in the congregation.[149] Scripture must set the agenda for culture formation.[150] Utilizing the words of God allows the revitalization leader to echo the words of Zechariah 4:6 in that this work of cultural formation "is not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit."[151] Regularly preaching that believers are connected to the *missio Dei* through their union with Christ will help motivate church members to raise their level of engagement.[152]

Once the revitalization leader has cast a preferred vision for the new culture, ideal behaviors must be modeled to bring that ideal culture into fruition. Imitation and identification work to change culture when the new beliefs and values are clear.[153] The leader must join the Apostle Paul who said in 1 Corinthians 11:1, "Imitate me, as I also imitate Christ."[154] The revitalization leader should use stories of people who are already living out the desired culture to provide role models for imitation and to celebrate the behavior that should be produced in the church.

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not just "abstractions that favor the rational mind." Without a sensible vision, the change initiatives "dissolve into a list of confusing and incompatible" projects that take the organization nowhere. See Kotter, *The Heart of Change*, 1, 31; Kotter, "Leading Change," 8.

[148] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 145.

[149] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 145.

[150] Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 93.

[151] Stetzer and Rainer, *Transformational Church*, 17.

[152] Scott Logson, "Three Ways to Create a Culture of Mission in Your Church," LifeWay Leadership, July 17, 2019, https://leadership.lifeway.com/2019/07/17/three-ways-to-create-a-culture-of-mission-in-your-church/.

[153] Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 331.

[154] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 146.

The fourth priority for changing church culture is implementation of new initiatives and evaluation of how the implementation is being carried out. Revitalization leaders must ensure that new cultural initiatives have viability in the current systems of the church. Some church leaders do well to cast a big vision for cultural change, but they do not create any tangible way for these changes to be lived out.[155] If mission culture is essential, the church must incorporate it into the "normal rhythm of the church."[156] Along with the new standards of behavior, there must be new standards of evaluation. When change in culture occurs, there must be "monitors installed all over the system for a while to enforce the standard of cleaning up all the spills."[157] Evaluation is the process of managing culture.[158]

Changing culture is a long and difficult process. This literature review has shown that revitalization for many churches is necessary and that turning from an inwardly focused church to a church in line with the *missio Dei* is integral to that revitalization. The last section of this review will cover mission culture in revitalization. Mission will be defined, missional theology and ecclesiology discussed, and missional priorities explored.

Mission Culture in Church Revitalization

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, over 90 percent of Christians in the world were found in the West.[159] This era of Christian mission "piggybacked" on Western colonialism. Michael Goheen surmises that much of the "course and practice" of

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[155] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 148.

[156] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 148.

[157] Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 335.

[158] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 148.

[159] Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today*, 16.

Christian mission melded with "colonialist's patterns."[160] This paradigm saw mission as a unidirectional activity that proceeded from the West to the other parts of the world. In this view, still held today by some, mission was the spread of the gospel to people of a different culture while evangelism was the spread of the gospel to people in the same culture of the church.[161]

Today, Christians in Europe and European-derived cultures only make up around 15 percent of the Christian population of the world.[162] Philip Jenkins concludes that the "era of Western Christianity has passed within our lifetimes, and the day of Southern Christianity is dawning. Christendom has collapsed, and the Western church must find an effective posture and strategy to approach its "home" culture.[163] Lesslie Newbigin stated that churches that are in the West, "are in a missionary situation in what once was Christendom."[164] With these seismic shifts, the revitalizing leader must be able to determine a cogent definition of mission in order to produce a mission culture that will lead to revitalization.[165]

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[160] Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today*, 16. During this time period, the idea of the "geographical expansion dominated the church" (15).

[161] Davis, *Revitalize*, 220. This is the view that many of the missions conversations in the past ninety years have come up against. Missiologists view it as unhealthy to view one's own culture as "Christianized." While Davis does not make that argument, this view seems to lead to the compartmentalization of mission and evangelism that could lead to churches' abdicating their responsibility to the nations.

[162] Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today*, 20.

[163] Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3. Hauerwas and Willimon note that in the past, "the church, home, and state formed a national consortium that worked together to instill 'Christian values.' People grew up Christian simply by being lucky enough to be born in places like Greenville, South Carolina, or Pleasant Grove, Texas." Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 16. Hauerwas and Willimon also go on to say that the "notion that the church needs some sort of surrounding 'Christian' culture to prop it up and mold its young is not a death to lament" (18). They are encouraged by the new opportunity that Christians have to live out their faith in the new surrounding "secular" culture.

[164] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 2.

[165] While some may lament this change in culture, this new cultural situation in which the Western church finds itself is full of potential and promise for the revitalization leader. Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 2.

Mission Defined

Because of the aforementioned shifts in global Christianity and culture in the West, the flow and direction of the mission theology conversation began to change around the turn of the twentieth century.[166] The increased attention and volume of voices in this conversation has created a vacuum of an evangelical consensus on the definition of mission. In fact David Bosch notes that in a way, mission is undefinable.[167] Adding to the complexity surrounding the quest to settle on a definition, mission is not intrinsically a biblical word like justification or salvation.[168] Evangelicals have proposed several major motifs in the quest to form a working definition of mission.[169] Evangelicals approach to mission can be categorized into three distinct camps. The first camp adheres to a holistic view of mission. The second camp holds to a view of mission that emphases acts of service equally with gospel declaration. The third and final group promotes a picture of mission that focuses on disciple-making.

The first group of evangelicals hold to a holistic view of mission. Some missiologists like Christopher Wright are not satisfied with a definition of mission that only involves "sending."[170] According to Wright, mission must be more than the "act of

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[166] Nathan A. Finn and Keith S. Whitfield, "The Missional Church and Spiritual Formation," in *Spirituality for the Sent: Casting a New Vision for the Missional Church*, ed. Nathan A. Finn and Keith S. Whitfield (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2017), 12. The chronology of this conversation is traced in the next section of this chapter.

[167] David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 9. Bosch advises to not "delineate mission to sharply or too self-confidently." Mission "should never be incarcerated in the narrow confines of our own predilections." Bosch concludes that we can only "approximate" what mission is about.

[168] Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 17. The Latin word *mittre*, from whence we get the English word "mission," occurs 137 times as a verb but never as a noun. This Latin word corresponds with the Greek word *apostellein*.

[169] Some theologians and church practitioners have run head long into heresy, jettisoning the gospel in their pursuit of pure mission. That discussion is traced in the next section titled "A Journey through the Contemporary Mission Conversations."

[170] John Stott and Christopher Wright, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Grand Rapids: IVP Press, 2015), 36. This sending motif is generated by the etymology of the Latin word for mission, *mittre*, which means "to send."

sending or the experience of being sent."[171] The act of being sent implies that the sender had a purpose or long range plan in view. The one being sent is a participant in the purpose of that sender. For Wright, the purpose is mission, not the sending activity.[172] Wright concludes that mission is the "committed participation as God's people, at God's invitation and command, in God's own mission, within the history of the world for the redemption of God's creation."[173] Mission according to Wright, is "what it's all about."[174] Michael Goheen states that mission is "God's purpose and activity to renew the entire creation and the whole of human life" and that the church should busy itself with a holistic redemption work.[175]

J. Andrew Kirk concludes that mission is the fundamental reality of the Christian life and therefore defines the existence of the church. Kirk determines that mission should be such a driving force in the life of a believer that life can find purpose in the extent that it is lived within a missionary dimension.[176] This view of mission could be summed up when Wright says, "If everything is mission…everything is mission."[177] While Wright admits that not everything that a Christian or a church does is cross-cultural evangelistic mission, but everything that they do should be missional and in

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[171] Stott and Wright, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 36.

[172] Stott and Wright, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 36.

[173] Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2006), 22-23 (original emphasis removed).

[174] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 22.

[175] Michael Goheen, *A Light to the Nations: The Mission Church and the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 19, Kindle. Christopher Little posits that those who hold this view see "evangelism, disciple-making, and church planting as no more important than ministries of social justice and humanitarianism." Christopher Little, "The Case of Prioritism, Part 1," *Great Commission Research Journal* 7, no. 2 (Winter 2016), 140.

[176] J. Andrew Kirk, *What Is Mission? Theological Explorations* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), chap. 1, Kindle.

[177] Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of God's People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 26.

"conscious participation in the mission of God in God's world."[178]

The second group of evangelicals see mission as a combination of "word and deed." Lesslie Newbigin concluded that mission is the "specific activities which are undertaken by human decision to bring the gospel to places or situations where it is not heard, to create a Christian presence in a place or situation where there is not such presence or no effective presence."[179] However, Newbigin notes that there has been a long tradition within the church to isolate the "declarative element" in mission and insist that evangelism must have priority, while all other church initiatives are "auxiliary."[180] Newbigin saw the battle of pitting "word and deed" against each other as absurd.[181] Preaching is never irrelevant, but the church must live the life that which corresponds to the words that it speaks.[182]

While Newbigin saw preaching the gospel as necessary and observed the power of the "words of God," he did not see biblical precedence in the church prioritizing preaching above any other activity of the church.[183] Newbigin saw mission happening at the "nexus of word and deed."[184] He noted that in the New Testament preaching was

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[178] Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 26. The Lausanne Covenant falls in line with this view of mission. In 1974 at the Lausanne Conference in Switzerland, the leading group of missiologists came up with this definition of mission: "the whole church, taking the whole gospel to the whole world." See Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today*, 27.

[179] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 129.

[180] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, 137. Newbigin sees an unnecessary battle being fought over those who elevated the "declarative function" of the church and those who gave first priority to action that challenged for justice and peace and fought against prejudice and oppression (139). Newbigin would define the "declarative element" as sharing the literal words of the message of the gospel.

[181] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, 146.

[182] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, 148. Interestingly, Newbigin states that the salvation of the world is not dependent on church growth. See Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 126.

[183] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, 146.

[184] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, 139.

meaningless without the healings. However, the miracles did not explain themselves.[185] Jesus gave his followers the mandate to preach and do good deeds.[186]

John Stott echoed the words of Newbigin when he surmised that traditional views of mission were too narrowly defined as evangelism, evangelists, and evangelistic programs. Stott saw this declarative definition of mission as leaving little room for works such as hospitals and schools counting as "real" mission.[187] Christians should avoid a negative view of culture that sees the church as on a rescue operation to rescue the culture from the fire that is consuming it.[188] Christianity that has lost its rooting in the words and thoughts of the true Gospel is useless for the world. Stott also saw Christianity that uses its faithfulness to the declaration of the gospel as an excuse to deny the responsibility to help their fellow humankind as a denial of God's love for the world.[189] In David Bosch's view, the church can neither be a secularized church, a church only concerned with temporary, worldly issues and interests, nor a separatist church, a church which only concerns itself with evangelism and preparation for the afterlife.[190]

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[185] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, 141. Newbigin notes that the Pharisees accused Jesus as being supplied by the power of Satan. Jesus's words were necessary to point to his real identity and mission. Newbigin points out that it was not the superiority of preaching that disarmed Rome but the power of faithful martyrs (146).

[186] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, 146. It should be noted that Newbigin sees the purpose of the church as extending outside the realm of salvation. He sees the church's purpose as not only to bring individuals to salvation but also to challenge and critique the hegemony and culture surrounding the church. Goheen points out that Newbigin thought that one of the purposes of the church is to "credibly represent Christ's claim to universal dominion over all of the life of the world without attempting to follow again the Constantinian road." See Michael Goheen, "As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You: Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Ecclesiology," *International Review of Mission* 91, no. 363 (July 2002): 365.

[187] Stott and Wright, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 16. Stott acknowledges that he evolved in his own views of what constituted mission. While formerly holding to more of a declarative definition of mission, Stott admits that he moved more toward the "word and deed" camp (22).

[188] Stott and Wright, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 17.

[189] Stott and Wright, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 20. See also W. A. Visser't Hooft, *The Uppsala 68 Report*, ed. Norman Goodall (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1968), 317-18.

[190] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 11.

The third group of evangelicals hold to a view of priority driven mission. [191] Stephen Neil said in his book *Creative Tension* that "if everything is mission, then nothing is mission."[192] Bosch surmises the word "mission" "presupposes a sender, a person or persons sent by the sender, those to whom one is sent, and an assignment."[193] These missiologists focus their definition of mission on the act of sending for a specific purpose. Stott argued that that mission is not everything the church does but rather what the church is sent into the world to do.[194] DeYoung and Gilbert note that Jesus sent us into the world to do something, not everything.[195]

Those in this camp are concerned that passion for social projects or renewing the city can "marginalize the one thing that makes us Christian, making disciples of Jesus Christ."[196] According to Zane Pratt, Christians do many good things that are viewed as mission, but are in fact merely alleviating the evil around them.[197] Denny Spitters and Matthew Ellison note that the history of the modern church shows that whenever the "primacy of disciple making and church planting have been replaced with efforts to eradicate the world's evil systems, diseases, and oppressions, the global discipleship

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[191] This is a term coined by Little in his article "The Case of Prioritism." Little concludes that one cannot state logically that there are priorities and simultaneously state that there are no priorities. Little also concludes that those who prioritize evangelism as the priority in mission are in the clear minority. Little notes that while few evangelicals desire to see a dichotomy between word and deed, they must make a choice on what their missional priorities are. Little argues that in light of the unevangelized, their salvation should be the driving force of today's missional movement. Little, "The Case of Prioritism," 141, 148.

[192] Stephen Neil, *Creative Tension* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh House Press, 1959), 81.

[193] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1.

[194] Stott and Wright, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 30.

[195] DeYoung and Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?*, 19. They argue that if mission can be equated to the mission of individual Christians or the continuation of the mission of Jesus, then there could be dozens of correct answers (16).

[196] DeYoung and Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?*, 21.

[197] Zane Pratt, "The Heart of Mission: Redemption," in *Theology and Practice of Mission: God, the Church, and the Nations*, ed. Bruce Ashford (Nashville: B&H, 2011), 48.

making activities of the church have floundered."[198] These missiologists do not oppose social reforms and initiatives that push for equality and justice, but they see mission being wrapped up in the process of making disciples. As disciples are made, both individual and social transformation takes place.[199] Christopher Little sees the shift of mission giving to relief and human development focus as "mission drift."[200] In their view, these missiologists believe that prioritizing disciple making as mission is essential to the church carrying out is mission now and being effective in future generations.[201]

A Journey through the Contemporary Mission Conversations

After settling on a viewpoint of the definition of mission, the revitalizing leader must create a theological foundation in order to build a culture of mission in the local church. As stated in the previous chapter, mission exists because worship does not.[202] Keith Whitfield argues that "mission exists because God exists."[203] As the revitalization leader shapes the local church's mission around the mission of God, "he will not fail."[204] The following sections will trace the *missio Dei* conversation over the past 90 years that has led to the missional church movement in the West.

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[198] Denny Spitters and Matthew Ellison, *When Everything Is Mission* (Orlando: Pioneers USA, 2017), chap. 2, Kindle.

[199] Spitters and Ellison, *When Everything Is Mission*, chap. 2.

[200] Little, "The Case of Prioritism," 141.

[201] Spitters and Ellison, *When Everything Is Mission*, chap. 2.

[202] John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 11.

[203] Keith Whitfield, "The Triune God: The God of Mission," in Ashford, *Theology and Practice of Mission*, 17.

[204] Whitfield, "The Triune God," 17.

Until the sixteenth century, the term *missio Dei* and its usage were used solely to describe the work of the Trinity, the Father sending the Son and the sending of the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Son.[205] The fall of colonialism and the rejection of the previously held idea that humanity had the capacity to change the world pushed missions back into the hands of God. Mission was not solely the church's endeavor, it was God's.[206] Over the last 100 years *the missio Dei* conversation has shifted and twisted from orthodoxy to heresy, and now to a diversity of viewpoints.[207]

Not only are the inwardly focused church's days of viability numbered but some would not even give it the designation "church."[208] Revitalization leaders realize that their church has been providentially given their geographical address in order to exegete their community and meet the unique physical and spiritual needs of the community.[209] The missional church conversation gives revitalization leaders a lens through which to accomplish ministry in a way that is loving and prophetic to the surrounding culture. The missional church conversation in many ways is the extension of the arc of the *missio Dei* concept.

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[205] Whitfield, "The Triune God," 18.

[206] Whitfield, "The Triune God," 18.

[207] For a summary of the formation of the current *missio Dei* thought and its origination, see Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 389-91; Whitfield, "The Triune God," 17-34; Finn and Whitfield, "The Missional Church and Spiritual Formation," 9-29; John G. Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); Mark Laing, "*Missio Dei*: Some Implications for the Church," *Missiology* 37, no. 1 (January 2009): 89; Keith S. Whitfield, "The Mission of Doctrine: An Evangelical Appropriation of the *Missio Dei* as a Key for Systematic Theology" (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013); Darrel L. Guder, *Called to Witness: Doing Missional Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015).

[208] Newbigin notes that because of the loss of "prophetic-critical stance" to culture, the church of Christendom took on a role of "protected and well decorated chaplaincy in the camp of dominant power." Lesslie Newbigin, "Christ, Kingdom, and Church: A Reflection on the Papers of George Yule and Andrew Kirk" (unpublished paper, 1983), 4. Newbigin also notes that the lack of missionary identity causes the church to think primarily of the "duty to care for its own members, and its duty to those outside drops into second place. A conception of pastoral care is developed which seems to assume that the individual believer is primarily a passive recipient of the means of grace which is the business of the church to administer." Lesslie Newbigin, *Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 166-67.

[209] Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 63.

By the 1990s the term "missional" was being connected to the *missio Dei* and the sending of God.[210] Much of the "missional church" movement in North America has been driven by the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN).[211] This movement is indebted to the influence and work of the British missionary and missiologist Lesslie Newbigin.[212] Newbigin's book *Foolishness to the Greeks* centered on the question, "What would be involved in a missionary encounter between the gospel and this whole way of perceiving, thinking, and living what we call modern Western culture?"[213] Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile conclude that the development of the GOCN was furthered by the 1991 publication of *Missiology* that was dedicated to the "gospel and culture conversation.[214] According to Van Gelder and Zscheile, this led to the 1996 book *The Church between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America*

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[210] Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 46. While the term "missional" was developed in the later part of the twentieth century, the earliest usage of the term was found in an 1883 book titled *The Heroes of African Discovery and Adventure*. A certain Bishop Tozar was called "the Missional Bishop of Central Africa . . . whose missional activities brought over whole districts and nationalities to their creed." See C. E. Bourne, *The Heroes of African Discovery and Adventure, from the Death of Livingston to the Year 1882* (London: W. S. Sonnenschein, 1883), 191. A more "substantial and theologically informed" usage of the word came from Francis DuBose, who stated, "What is needed is not so much a theology of mission but a missional theology." Francis DuBose, *God Who Sends: A Fresh Quest for Biblical Mission* (Nashville: Broadman, 1983), 149. In 1991, Charles Van Engen made use of the term "missional" in a way that described how the church "intersects with its local context." Van Engen makes the biblical and theological argument that the church is missionary by nature. See Charles E. Van Engen, *God's Missionary People: Rethinking the Purpose of the Local Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1991), 127, 145.

[211] Finn and Whitfield, "The Missional Church and Spiritual Formation," 10. This network was "made of theological educators, pastors, denominational administrators, and lay leaders from a variety of mainline denominations." Even though this movement was driven by mainline thinkers, its influence has spread out beyond to evangelical circles.

[212] After years on the mission field, Newbigin returned to teach missionary theology at Selly Oak Colleges. This return to England forced him to take the challenge of engaging the late-modern culture of the West with the gospel. Newbigin was far more than a practitioner during his time as a missionary. He held posts in the International Missionary Council (IMC) and was influential with the merger of the IMC with the World Council of Churches to become the Commission on the World Mission and Evangelism. Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 37.

[213] Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 1.

[214] Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 92.

edited by George Hunsberger and Crag Van Gelder.[215] The popularity of that book led to funding by the Pew Charitable Trust to the study and writing project that would turn into *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*.[216] While there is much to learn from and appropriate from the *missio Dei* and missional church conversations, revitalization leaders must be wise to adopt those principles that allow them to faithfully turn inwardly focused churches outward to reach their local context. This will be the theme of the next section.

Missiological Priorities for Revitalization

God is the basis of everything, including mission.[217] The progression of the *missio Dei* and missional church conversations have proved helpful to the evangelical church, but they must be approached intentionally to avoid the dangers of jettisoning orthodoxy. The following discussion points to the missiological priorities a revitalizer must employ to push his church not only to revitalization but also proper ecclesiology.

Mission derived from God's nature and character. "A biblically constructed theology of mission must be based upon the nature and the life of the triune God."[218] The mission that the local church finds itself on is the mission of God himself, and "he alone can bring it to completion."[219] "God's mission is connected to his nature

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[215] Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 93. See also George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder, eds., *The Church Between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

[216] Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 37.

[217] Whitfield, "The Triune God," 19.

[218] Whitfield, "The Triune God," 19.

[219] Doug Coleman, "The Agents of Mission: Humanity," in Ashford, *Theology and Practice of Mission*, 39.

and his character.[220] God is a missionary because he has determined himself to be for and with the human."[221]

When churches and Christians participate in mission, they connect with God himself. God is on a mission to restore and redeem for his sake.[222] This view of the *missio Dei* focuses on God's sending activities but also underscores that God sends for a purpose. The "sending" activities of God are shaped by the "nature, life, and purpose of the triune God."[223] The church's partnership in mission is set in the "framework" of God's will to be known by his creation.[224] This view of the *missio Dei* also realizes that God's mission in creation and redemption is the same: to be known and worshipped.[225] This view of mission does not ignore the cultural mandate but will both "save the sinner and transform the culture."[226]

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[220] Whitfield, "The Triune God," 19.

[221] Flett, *The Witness of God*, 288. Charles Taber states that the fact that the Bible exists is irrefutable proof of a God who "refuses to forsake his rebellious creation." Charles R. Taber, "Missiology and the Bible," *Missiology* 11, no. 2 (1983): 232.

[222] Whitfield, "The Triune God," 19. Whitfield reflects on four different descriptions or camps noticed by Goheen of how missiologists have implemented the *missio Dei*. The first camp consists of those who believe that God is restoring the world for the sake of the world. Those who hold this view include J. C. Hoekendijk and Brian McLaren. They advocate that God is working through existing social, economic, and political structures to redeem creation. God is using secular history to bring about his purpose of restoring shalom in the word. This camp is considered cosmocentric in that this shalom purpose can be accomplished without, and outside of, the church. The second camp focuses on the "sending activity" of mission without necessarily focusing on the purpose of being sent. Their famous line is "God sends the Son into the World, the Son and Father send the Spirit into the World, and the Father, Son, and Spirit send the church into the world" (20). This view would be considered Christocentric because it focuses on the "person and work of Jesus at the center of God's sending activities" (21). Major proponents of this view include Karl Barth, John Stott, Francis Dubose and Ed Stetzer. The third camp focuses on the salvific activity of God. God's mission is to save individual souls from their sins. Proponents of this view are St. Augustine, Georg Vicedom, and Stephen Holmes. The four camp holds the view that God redeems and restores for his own sake. This view is characterized as eschatological-christocentric-trinitarian. This view—which I follow in this research project—is held by Lesslie Newbigin, Christopher Wright, and Timothy Tennent. See Goheen, "As the Father Has Sent Me, I am Sending You," 1-17.

[223] Whitfield, "The Triune God," 21.

[224] Whitfield, "The Triune God," 21. See also Wright, *The Mission of God*, 62-64, 75-135.

[225] Whitfield, "The Triune God," 21.

[226] John M. Frame, *Salvation Belongs the Lord: An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, HJ: P&R, 2006), 98.

Whitfield notes that it may not be helpful to divide the character of the Trinity from the activities of the Trinity.[227] As the church participates in the *missio Dei* through their union with Christ, they not only accomplish the purpose of God but experience the character and nature of God.[228] Mission is a necessary consequence of our union with Christ. The believer has become one with Christ and therefore is sent, not in isolation from Christ, but as one who continues his "sentness" as "his mystical body."[229] Mission takes shape around the character of God, and is elevated beyond mere sending activities into practices that not only affect the community but change believers in the process.[230] When thinking about joining in mission, Newbigin exclaimed, "mission is acted out of doxology, out of a radioactive fallout from an explosion of joy."[231] As the church

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[227] Whitfield, "The Triune God," 23. Whitfield brings forth the idea that humanity cannot distinguish between the nature of God and his actions. Theologians usually employ the immanent view of the Trinity to describe the relationship of the triune God with himself, and they use the economic view of the Trinity to describe God's acts toward creation. Whitfield does not see the need to prioritize one view of the Trinity over the other. The immanent view gives a rubric and foundation for the *missio Dei*, while the economic view highlights the acts of God in history, tracing the story of the *missio Dei*. Flett concludes that any separation of the actions of God from the character of God would actually keep God from us. Flett, *The Witness of God*, 199.

[228] J. Todd Billings, *Union with Christ: Reframing Ministry and Theology for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 65. Billings notes the words of John Calvin that the individual believers "day by day" grow more into one body, participating with Christ in his mission. See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1559 ed., ed. J. T. McNeill, trans. F. L. Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 3.2.24.

[229] Ross Hastings, *Missional God, Missional Church: Hope for Re-Evangelizing the West* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2012), 265. Billings critiques the concept of incarnational ministry that many mission church leaders promote. Billings concludes that the incarnation of the Word in the person of Jesus Christ is a unique and unrepeatable event. As such, the incarnation is not an "ongoing process" to be repeated or a "mode" to be copied by a Christian ministry. Rather, the focus should be on Christ, in whom the Christian has been united. Billings contends that the outcomes of the incarnational model can be actualized more faithfully by recognizing and living within "Paul's matrix of union with Christ." Specifically, Billings critiques one of the leading proponents of incarnational ministry, Alan Hirsch, and his work *The Forgotten Ways*. Billings sees Hirsch as gathering his support for incarnational ministry from 1 Cor 9:22. However, that passage has no specific illustration to imitate. Billings further notes that out of the four implications of incarnational ministry that Hirsch puts forward, only one of the four directly relates to the incarnation. Billings offers union with Christ as a better alternative to perform ministry done in tune with the *missio Dei*. Billings, *Union with Christ*, 124, 128-29. We have become relationally one with Christ and thus are sent out in him, not in isolation but as those who "continue his 'sentness' as his mystical body." Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 245.

[230] Whitfield, "The Triune God," 22.

[231] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, 118, 127. Joseph Ratzinger also concludes that authentic mission proclamation should be expressed with glad tidings and joyous overflow of faith.

participates in God's mission, not only are they sent out to act in partnership with God, but they are relationally brought deeper into God's relationship with God. This "bi-directional" mimicking of the Trinity not only produces growth in the objects of the mission, but in the church itself. As the church is sent out in the *missio Dei*, it is sent further inward into the nature of God.[232] As people go out on mission, mission exposes their "weakness and launches" them back into dependence on God's grace to further transform them.[233]

The church as missionary. In order to recapture the heart of God for the world, the inwardly focused church must again reorient itself toward the world in a missionary posture. Lesslie Newbigin states that the church is "set by God in the midst of the world as the sign of that to which all creation and all world history moves."[234] The church must shift from finding its identity as a vendor of religious services that can sometimes be reduced to a gathering of strangers who see the church as another place to gratify their materialistic desires.[235] God has placed the church within his overarching mission. [236] Mission in many ways is God's movement to the world, and the church is

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Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 75-84.

[232] Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today*, 296

[233] Diane Chandler, "Godly Love: The Primary Missional Virtue," in Finn and Whitfield, *Spirituality for the Sent*, 174.

[234] Lesslie Newbigin, "Mission and Unity of the Church" (Peter Ainslei Memorial lecture delivered at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa, October 17, 1960), 16-17. Newbigin also sees church unity as essential to mission. Newbigin sees the disunity that is a naturally found occurrence in the inwardly focused church as a "direct and public contradiction of the Gospel." Lesslie Newbigin, *Is Christ Divided? A Plea for Christian Unity in a Revolutionary Age* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 24. The church that takes mission seriously must "struggle toward unity." Michael Goheen, *The Church and Its Vocation: Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 64, Kindle.

[235] Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 137.

[236] Jedidiah Coppenger, "The Community of Mission: The Church," in Ashford, *Theology and Practice of Mission*, 60.

viewed as an instrument for that mission.[237] The church exists for mission, not mission for church.[238]

In order to join God as his missionary people, the church must move beyond the prevailing practice of most inwardly focused churches who relegate mission to a program that the church carries out occasionally or gives financial resources to. The church must not separate its ecclesiology from its missiology. Graham Hill in his book *Salt, Light, and the City: Introducing a Missional Ecclesiology* puts forward what he calls *notae missionis*, the marks of a missional church.[239] The first tenet or mark of a missional church is a foundation built on a commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ and to the reliability and authority of the Bible. Missional churches must obey Scripture and base their very being on the person of Christ.[240] If sin is the main cause of the curse, then the gospel must be the solution.[241] If Christianity is a new understanding, and the church is

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[237] Anna Marie Aagaard, "Trends in Missiological Thinking during the Sixties," *International Review of Mission* 62 (1973): 13. Some would resist the nomenclature and classification of "instrument" for the church. For these thinkers, the question has more to do with ontology than axiology. Simon Chan asks, "If the church is essentially an instrument, then its basic identity can be expressed in terms of its functions: what it must do to fulfill God's larger purpose. But if the church is God's end in creation, then its basic identity can be expressed only in ontological . . . terms." Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshiping Community* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 21. In 2019, Trevin Wax completed a helpful series of blogs on the missional church, interacting with a contrasting viewpoint of the mission church from Mark Galli from *Christianity Today*. See Trevin Wax, "Is the Church an Instrument?," Gospel Coalition, August 22, 2019, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/is-the-church-an-instrument/. See also Mark Galli, "The Purpose of the World: to Become the Church," *Christianity Today*, June 18, 2019, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/june-web-only/purpose-of-world-to-become-church.html.

[238] Anna Marie Aagaard, "*Missio Dei* in katholischer Sicht," *Evangelische Theologie* 34, (1974): 423.

[239] Hill builds his idea of *notae missionis* from the work of John Howard Yoder, in his book *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiastical and Ecumenical* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 1994), and Darrel Guder's chapter, "Missional Connectedness: The Community of Communities in Mission," in *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), chap. 9, Kindle. Yoder puts forward the marks of holy living, brotherly and sisterly love, and witness and suffering. Guder puts forward the missional marks of unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. It should be noted that Hill puts forth his *notae missionis* as complementary too, and not as a replacement of, the traditional *notae ecclesia*. See Graham Hill, *Salt, Light, and a City: Introducing Missional Ecclesiology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 164.

[240] Hill, *Salt, Light, and a City*, 165.

[241] Coleman, "The Agents of Mission," 44.

the expression of that understanding, the words of God found in the Bible must be paramount for the church. Hauerwas and Willimon surmise that the church must not give up on principle in order to have broader influence on society. The missional church's power does not lie in the personal transformation of hearts or the modification of society, but rather in the church's determination to worship Christ preeminently.[242]

The second mark of a missional church is a church that embraces and cultivates missional ecclesiology throughout every crack and crevice of the church's structures, practices, systems, offices, and ministries.[243] Awareness of the participation in *missio Dei* shapes all that the church is and does. The church must resist the temptation of the inwardly focused church to "order its life simply in relation to its own concerns and for the purposes of its own continued existence. The church does not exist for itself or for what it can offer its members."[244] The revitalization leader must structure the church to carry out God's mission in the particular place the church exists.[245]

The third mark of a missional church is for the church to live out its calling as a contrasting community, called out of the world to give witness to the eschatological and kingdom reign of Christ in their specific location.[246] The church must understand the importance of the "missional relevance and critical contextualization" of the gospel, and must own the truth that it is an "alternative, distinct, eschatological society" that must consider itself, aliens, sojourners, exiles, and pilgrims formed into a countercultural,

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[242] Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 45. Scott Hafemann exhorts the church to reject the newfound trinity of the modern church: technology, psychology, and marketing. Scott J. Hafemann, *The God of Promise and the Life of Faith: Understanding the Heart of the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 20.

[243] Hill, *Salt, Light, and a City*, 165.

[244] Goheen, *The Church and Its Vocation*, 82.

[245] Goheen, *The Church and Its Vocation*, 122.

[246] Hill, *Salt, Light, and a City*, 165.

Spirit-empowered community.[247] The contrasting church shakes the Constantinian mindset of Christendom which inhibited the church from interacting with the culture in a constructively critical way.[248] The missional church cannot feel at home in any culture.[249] The church should move away from practices that merely extract people from the world. Instead, the church should call and equip people to follow Jesus in the world where they live.[250] Hauerwas and Willimon argue that the church must accept the fact that no amount of "tinkering" with the structures of society can rectify the problem of human sin.[251] As the church embraces this contrasting mindset, it is enabled to cease asking of the world to do only what it can do for itself.[252]

The fourth mark of a missional church is the local church viewing every culture as a mission field.[253] There is neither a biblical nor theological basis for the division of evangelism and mission. There is no culture that is completely Christian; consequently, every culture is in need of a gospel witness that urges submission to

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[247] Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Doren, *Introducing the Missional Church: What It Is, Why It Matters, How to Become One* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 5-8.

[248] Wilbert Shenk, "The Culture of Modernity as a Missionary Challenge," in *The Good News of the Kingdom: Mission Theology for the Third Millennium*, ed. Charles Van Engen, Dean S. Gilliland, and Paul Pierson (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997), 194. Shenk advocates that the church should follow Jesus in being a source of *basileia*. Jesus was a source of judgment and hope, and according to Shenk, the modern church should follow suite (197). Newbigin also led much of the charge of highlighting a need for a rethinking of how the Western church should approach its home culture. Ian Barns highlights Newbigin's desire to create a church that recovered the "alternative universalist counter claims of Christianity based on the . . . life, death, and resurrection of Jesus." Ian Barns, "Christianity in a Pluralist Society: A Dialogue with Lesslie Newbigin," *St. Mark's Review* 158 (Winter 1994): 29.

[249] Shenk, "The Culture of Modernity as a Missionary Challenge," 198. Shenk brings forward the speech given by W. A. Visser't Hooft, the founding general secretary of the World Council of Churches, in which he describes today's world as "neo-paganism." The culture that the modern church exists in has many similarities of that of the New Testament world (196).

[250] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st Century Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 39.

[251] Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 43.

[252] Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 18.

[253] Hill, *Salt, Light, and a City*, 165.

God.[254] The church should practice mission faithfulness in all cultural contexts. This new humanity of the church exists not for the sake of what it "can offer its members, but to carry out God's mission to the particular place in which it is set."[255]

Missional Practices for Revitalization

Missional churches should have a diverse and contextual approach to the practices that they employ to reach their community. As revitalizing leaders push their church to partner in the *missio Dei*, they must choose missional practices that are "fluid, contextual, indigenous, gospel affirming, and biblically based."[256] However, there is no "cookie-cutter" model or framework of how a missional church practically plays out their role of partnering with God in his mission.[257] The following sections will give a brief overview of some missional practices that will guide the church to revitalization through partnering with the *missio Dei*.

Short-term mission. As noted earlier, mission was unthought of and unheard of in the age of Christendom until colonization began to take place.[258] However, in the last half of the twentieth century short-term trips have become increasingly popular and have shifted the paradigm of missions from home-based financial supporters to allowing for more average Christians to experience cross-cultural mission work.[259] There has been

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[254] Shenk, "The Culture of Modernity as a Missionary Challenge," 198.

[255] Goheen, *The Church and Its Vocation*, 122.

[256] Hill, *Salt, Light, and a City*, 165.

[257] Timothy Keller, *Serving a Movement: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 45.

[258] These early mission works were more long-term in nature.

[259] Michael Wilder and Shane Parker estimate that in the US, around forty thousand mission agencies send over one million short-term members. Michael S. Wilder and Shane W. Parker, *TransforMission: Making Disciples through Short-Term Missions* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 32, Kindle. There are many different arguments against short-term trips. David Mays says that every year, short-term trips occur at a cost of over a billion dollars, and he questions the effectiveness of such an exorbitant cost. David Mays, "Six Challenges of the Church in Missions," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 42, (2006): 312.

much literature debating the validity and helpfulness of short-term trips, but intentional, well thought out short-term trips have proved to change participants lives and provide them opportunities to engage with the *mission-Dei*.[260] Short-term experiences have the opportunity to transform the individual into a "full participant in God's redemptive story."[261]

While there has been quantitative work done on the effects of short-term trips on the spiritual life of the individual, there has not been significant work done on how short-term trips affect the sending congregation. The weight of research done on the relationship between short-term trips and the sending congregation is qualitative.[262] This

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Others critique short-term trips as field trips and sanctified vacations. See Alex Smith, "Evaluating Short-Term Missions: Missiological Questions," in *Effective Engagement in Short-Term Missions: Doing It Right!*, ed. Robert Priest (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2008), chap. 2, Kindle. Short-term mission trips may appease the conscience of the participants while allowing them to stay a safe distance from the poor. See Shane Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 157. Others are critical of short-term trips because they do not see short-term trips as being effective in sending more long-term workers. See Dotsey Welliver and Minnette Northcutt, eds., *Mission Handbook 2004-2006: US and Canadian Protestant Ministries Oversees* (Wheaton, IL: EMIS, 2004), 13.

[260] Wilder and Parker, *TransforMission*, 34. Short-term trips can provide opportunities for individuals to practice learning from other cultures, humbly serving, and create pathways of ministry apprenticeship. See Smith, "Evaluating Short-Term Missions," chap. 2.

[261] Wilder and Parker, *TransforMission*, 59. Wilder and Parker see the transformation of the individual in several ways: (1) increased understanding and commitment to biblical Christianity, (2) greater openness to volunteer and vocational ministry service, (3) gaining a global perspective, (4) increased self-awareness, and (5) growing and developing leadership skills (59-61). Wilder and Parker also posit that there is short-term research that reports the kind of significant transformation that they affirm, but there is also short-term research that shows little or no change in individuals. For a sampling of those studies, see Wilder and Parker, *TransforMission*, 76-81; Kurt Alan Ver Beek, "Lessons from the Sapling: Review of Quantitative Research on Short-Term Mission," in Priest, *Effective Engagement in Short-Term Missions*, chap. 17, Kindle. Wilder and Parker note that when short-term trips are "one-time events," they are not meaningful for the individual. The trip brings more potential growth for the individual when they are viewed as part of the discipleship process holistically. Wilder and Parker, *TransforMission*, 190.

[262] Studies that have been done on short-term missions have been mostly qualitative in nature. Here is a sampling of some academic work done on the effects of short-term trips on congregations: B. Hunter Ferrell, "From Short-Term Mission to Global Discipleship: A Peruvian Case Study," *Missiology an International Review* 41, no. 2 (March 2013): 163-78, C. M. Brown, "Friendship Is Forever: Congregation to Congregation Relationships," in Priest, *Effective Engagement in Short-Term Missions*, chap. 8, Kindle; C. M. Brown, "Exploratory Case Studies and Analyses of Three Intercultural Congregation to Congregation Partnerships" (PhD diss., Trinity International University, 2007); Dean C. Ahlberg, "Our Identity: The Story That Gathers Us in and Sends Us out" (DMin project, Hartford Theological Seminary, 2005); Stephen J. Chambers, "The Partnership Conversation: The Contribution of Cross-Cultural Experience to Contemporary Mission Understandings" (DMin project, Toronto School of Theology, 1993); Wang T. Chin, "Urban Church Resources for Short-Term Mission," in Priest, *Effective Engagement in Short-Term Missions*, chap. 9, Kindle; Kersten Bayt Priest, "Women as Resource Brokers: Short-Term Mission Trips, Social and Organizational Ties and Mutual Resource," in Priest, *Effective Engagement in*

qualitative research has produced some helpful findings for the revitalizing leader pushing their inwardly focused church to join in the *missio Dei*. Because of our partnership with the *missio Dei*, short-term trips have the potential to transform both the host and sending communities.[263]

Researchers of short-term missions note that one of the biggest benefits of partnerships between Western and global churches is the transfer of social capital.[264] Short term trips can teach Western churches about suffering, sharing, true worship, and the ways that they ways they have been negatively affected by secular Western culture.[265] C. René Padilla surmises that short-term missions have the potential to push congregations into ministry and for the "declericalization" of ministry and the "laicization" of the professional ministers.[266] Revitalization leadership that hope to mobilize more congregants in the *missio Dei* should cease their struggle to decide whether to support local or global mission priorities by integrating both types of trips and initiatives in one focus.[267]

Church planting. C. Peter Wagner concluded, "The single most effective

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Short-Term Missions, chap. 10, Kindle; Rolando W. Cuellar, "Short-Term Missions Are Bigger Than You Think: Missiological Implications for the Glocal Church," in Priest, *Effective Engagement in Short-Term Missions*, chap. 11, Kindle.

[263] Farrell, "From Short-Term Mission to Global Discipleship," 169.

[264] Farrell, "From Short-Term Mission to Global Discipleship," 164. See also Brown, "Friendship Is Forever."

[265] David J. Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict: 10 Key Questions in Christian Missions Today* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2005), 232.

[266] C. René Padilla, "The Local Church: Local Change and Global Impact" (paper delivered at Micah Conference, 2001), https://www.micahnetwork.org/sites/default/files/doc/resources/openning_address_the_local_church_rene_padilla-en.pdf. In order for effective mission to happen, there must be a flattening of the hierarchy of the church. The whole church must realize their giftedness and invitation to the Great Commission. See also Padilla, "Introduction: An Ecclesiology for Integral Mission," in *The Local Church, Agent of Transformation: An Ecclesiology for Integral Mission*, ed. Tetsunao Yamamori and C. René Padilla (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Kairos, 2004), 19-49.

[267] Cuellar, "Short-Term Missions," chap. 11.

evangelistic methodology under heaven is planting new churches."[268] Wagner believed that church planting helps existing churches develop leaders as well as raise "the religious interest" of those that live in the geographical area.[269]

Until recently there was only anecdotal support that planting churches stimulated growth in the sending church.[270] Farmer concludes that the sending church is positively affected in eight growth variables in their church planting effort. These variables could be divided into two categories: monetary and worship attendance.[271] One of the more significant findings by Farmer is that on average the sponsor church's worship attendance increased by "21.5 percent for the five years after the church plant."[272] Church planting seems to put the "blessed reflex" on display for revitalizers to observe and follow suite.

As previously noted, participation in the *missio Dei* by individuals has produced spiritual growth in the individual. This study has noted the void in the literature to discover the compounding effect of a local congregation shifting to partner with the *missio Dei* via their union with Christ. This study hopes to unearth missiological trends, themes, and practices that can be considered, shaped, and implemented in congregations beyond the study sample in order to see revitalization.

Conclusion

Churches across America are in need of transformation of mission culture that

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[268] Wagner, *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest*, 11.

[269] Wagner, *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest*, 20.

[270] Farmer, "Church Planting Sponsorship," 4. Farmer notes that church planting professors at Southern Baptist seminaries teach this as fact.

[271] Farmer, "Church Planting Sponsorship," 79-80. While these categories do not necessarily imply spiritual revitalization, they are clear indicators of positivity. Farmer notes that an attitude of "missional giving seemed to be fostered through the sponsorship relationship" (80). In fact, the designated gifts to the church increased by 77.4 percent, and tithes and offerings increased by 48.4 percent (81).

[272] Farmer, "Church Planting Sponsorship," 79-80.

pushes against the desire of a selfish church to care for the need of its own members. The literature is clear that as churches join the *missio Dei,* they themselves are revitalized. However, a void has been identified in the specifics of how transforming mission culture affects revitalization. This study seeks to fill the void in the literature where church revitalization, congregational transformation, and missional culture intersect. Chapter 3 will introduce and explain the methodology and rational for this study on the role of missional culture in church revitalization.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The existing literature on church revitalization not only reveals the dire need for church revitalization but also highlights the paramount focus of the development of mission culture. However, a need exists in the literature to not only obtain quantitative results relating to church revitalization, but to explain the results in more detail in terms of participant perspectives relating to the role of mission culture development.[1] This study seeks to fill that need.

This chapter describes the methodology employed in this study. The state of existing literature on the role of mission in church revitalization recommends an explanatory sequential mixed methods design.[2] Specifically, this study utilized the participant-selection variant of the explanatory mixed methods design. John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark note, "This variant is used when the researcher is focused on qualitatively examining a phenomenon but needs initial quantitative results to identify and purposefully select the best participants."[3] Figure 1 illustrates this design structure while the following two sections state the purpose of the study along with a synopsis of

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[1] John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011), 151.

[2] Creswell and Plano Clark, *Mixed Methods Research*, 82. "This design is most useful when the researcher wants to access trends and relationships with quantitative data but also be able to explain the mechanism or reasons behind the resultant trends."

[3] Creswell and Plano Clark, *Mixed Methods Research*, 85-86. The authors note two variants of the explanatory mixed methods design. The "follow-up explanations variant" is most common, places a priority on the quantitative phase, and uses the qualitative phase to explain the quantitative results. However, the less common participant-selection variant places a priority on the second qualitative phase.

the research questions.[4]

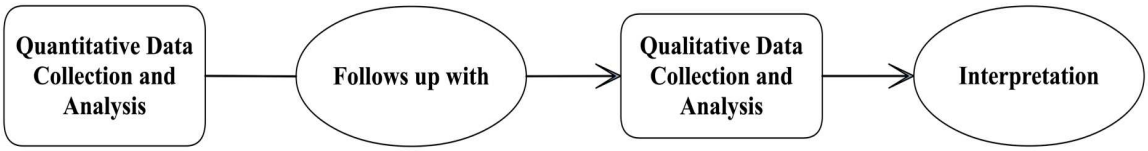

Figure 1. Sequential explanatory mixed methods design

Research Purpose

The overall scope of the larger sequential explanatory mixed methods study was to identify revitalizing churches and learn what methods they utilized to successfully move toward revitalization.[5] However, the focus of this portion of the study was to determine and prioritize key cultural change characteristics and practices present within Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) churches which have experienced revitalization. This particular segment of the study investigated how transforming the mission culture of the church results in revitalization.

Research Questions Synopsis

1. What percentage of SBC churches are plateaued or declining?
2. Of those churches that have experienced decline what percentage have experienced revitalization?

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[4] Figure 1 is adapted from Creswell and Plano Clark, *Mixed Methods Research*, 69.

[5] John Creswell notes,

> The explanatory sequential mixed methods approach is a design in mixed-methods that appeals to individuals with a strong quantitative background or from fields relatively new to qualitative approaches. It involves a two-phase project in which the researcher collects quantitative data in the first phase, analyzes the results, and then uses the results to plan (or build on to) the second, qualitative phase. The quantitative results typically inform the types of participants to be purposefully selected from the qualitative phase and the types of questions that will be asked of the participants. The overall intent of this design is to have the qualitative data help explain in more detail the initial quantitative results. (John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 4th ed. [Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2014], 224)

3. Of those SBC churches experiencing revitalization, what percentage emphasized mission in the process of revitalization?
4. In what ways does transforming the mission culture contribute to church revitalization?
5. What changes to the church's organizational culture facilitated effective mission culture?
6. What mission principles, priorities, and best practices can be identified for use in other revitalization contexts?

Design Overview

This study was conducted as one component of a larger study with six other studies investigating the factors contributing to church revitalization. This mixed methods design consisted of two components. The first component was the quantitative strand consisting of two phases. Phase 1 collected and analyzed data on churches in the Southern Baptist Convention to produce a list of churches that have experienced revitalization. Phase 2 utilized a survey to discover churches that identify mission culture as a contributing factor to revitalization. The qualitative strand was the second component of the study. A select number of churches that identified mission as contributing to revitalization were invited to participate in interviews. These interviews further investigated the role mission played in the revitalization process for each church. The qualitative interviews provided further understanding and insight into the relationship between mission and church revitalization. The following sections detail the purpose and design of each component and strand of the study. See figure 2 below for a glimpse of the design overview.

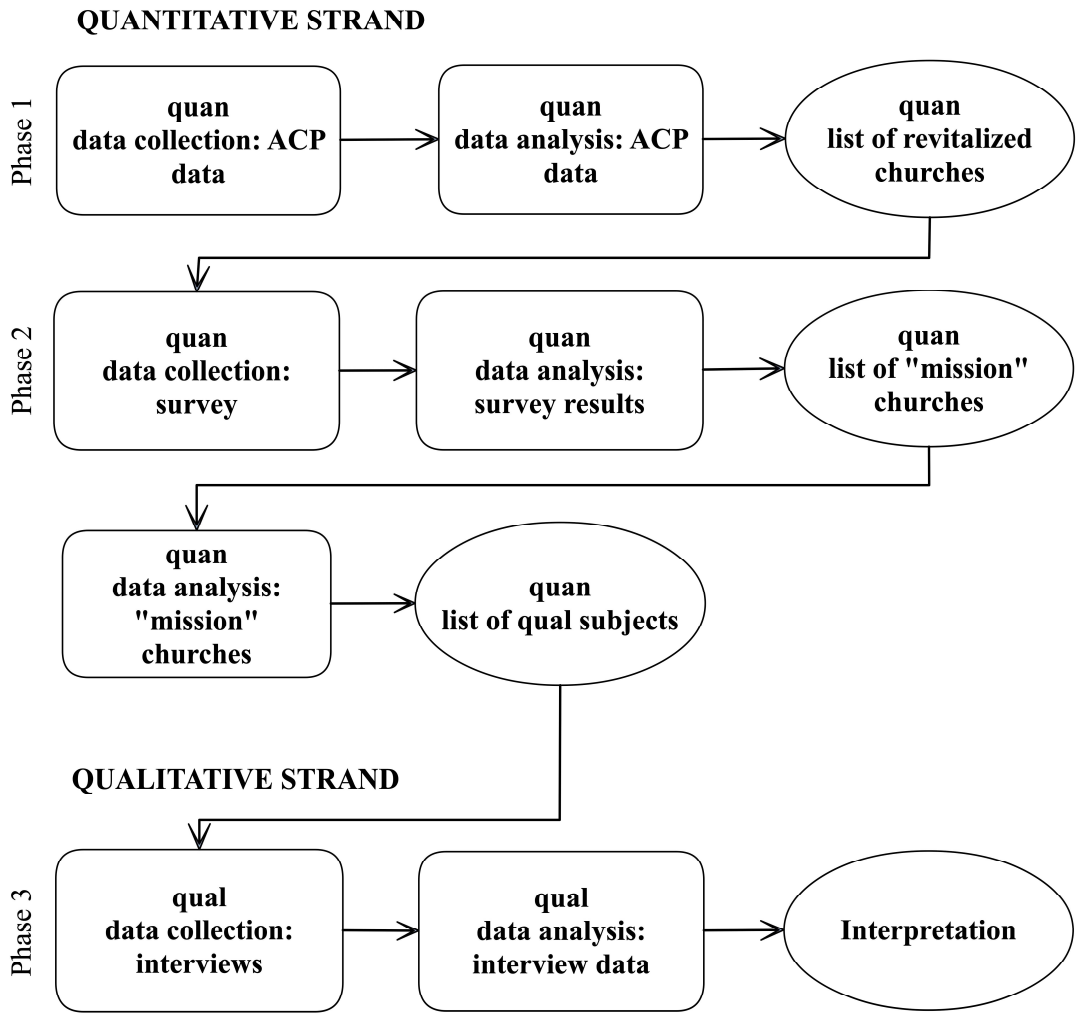

Figure 2. Design overview

Quantitative Strand

The entire research team jointly conducted the quantitative phases of the study. In an explanatory sequential mixed methods design, the purpose of the quantitative strand is to identify types of individuals (or churches in this case) to be selected for the qualitative strand.[6] The first three research questions were addressed in the quantitative strand. The purpose and specifics of each quantitative phase follows.

[6] Creswell, *Research Design*, 224.

Phase 1. The purpose of phase 1 was to define the criteria of revitalization and identify the churches that meet that criterion. The data for this phase was drawn from the Annual Church Profile (ACP) submissions for Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) churches in North America. The data analysis for this phase consisted of applying the revitalization criteria to the ACP data. The product is a list of churches in the SBC that have experienced revitalization. This list of revitalized churches provided the sample for phase 2.

Phase 2. The purpose of this phase was to discover churches from phase 1 that identified mission as a significant factor in the church's revitalization. For this phase, the research team administered a survey to churches from phase 1 that met the criteria for revitalization. This survey included items relating to church demographics, a respondent's role in the revitalization, and sections specifically related to each of the team members' emphasis. Data analysis for this phase consisted of compiling survey responses to measure and rank churches in each of the categories of emphasis. The product of the analysis was a list of churches that rated mission as a significant factor in the revitalization process. This list of mission churches provided the sample for the following qualitative strand.

Qualitative Strand

The third phase was conducted individually by each research team member and focused on the specific emphases of revitalization. In an explanatory sequential mixed methods design, the qualitative data is drawn from participants identified in the quantitative strand and helps explain in more detail the initial quantitative results.[7] The following section details the purpose and components of the qualitative strand.

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[7] Creswell, *Research Design*, 224.

Phase 3. The purpose of this phase was to explore how mission culture contributed to the revitalization of churches from phase 2. This qualitative strand employed a phenomenological approach in an attempt to understand the shared experience of mission in a church revitalization.[8] For this phase, the data collection was the administration of semi-structured interviews from the "mission" churches list produced in phase 2. The data analysis consisted of transcription, coding, and content analysis of the interviews. The product of this phase were findings represented by themes and categories in the form of models of mission culture in churches that experienced revitalization.

This section provided an overview of this study. The research design allowed for the qualitative strand to inform the results of the quantitate strand. Table 1 correlates the research design components with corresponding research questions.

Interpretation

The final component of the study was interpretation. Both the quantitative and qualitative results were summarized and interpreted as well as research questions answered. This section will "discuss to what extent and in what ways the qualitative results helped to explain the quantitative results."[9]

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[8] Creswell notes that phenomenologists focus on discovering the "common experience" that participants have in a certain phenomenon. The researcher then attempts to "reduce individual experiences . . . to a description of universal essence." The researcher then attempts to "develop a composite description of the experience for all of the individuals." John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2013), 76.

[9] Creswell and Plano Clark, *Mixed Methods Research*, 84.

Table 1. Research design and research questions

Research Design	RQs
Quantitative	
Phase 1	1, 2
Phase 2	3
Qualitative	
Phase 3	4, 5, 6

Research Population

The population for this study were members or affiliate churches of the Southern Baptist Convention within North America who have experienced revitalization. This research was limited to churches in the SBC who voluntarily returned the ACP to LifeWay Research for data collection.[10] Churches within the SBC share a common culture and confessional context, which allows for greater commonality in sampling. The following section describes the process of delimiting the population in each phase of the study.

Delimitations and Sampling

The research was delimited to SBC churches that completed the ACP during 2006-2016 and met the criterion established for revitalization. Second, the research was delimited to churches who agreed to participate in the study and indicated that transforming the mission culture was a significant factor in the church revitalization efforts. The research design includes four specific points of delimitation to arrive at the population and sample for this study. The first delimitation occurred prior to phase 1. To be eligible for the study, a church must be a member or affiliate of the Southern Baptist

[10] LifeWay Research is a ministry of LifeWay Christian Resources that exists to "assist churches and believers to evangelize the world to Christ, develop believers, and grow churches by being the best provider of relevant, high quality, high value Christian products and services." Southern Baptist Convention, "LifeWay Christian Resources," accessed January 16, 2019, http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/entities/lifeway.asp.

Convention and have completed the ACP in the years of 2006 through 2016. Therefore, churches that have not submitted ACP data for every year in the timeline are excluded from consideration in the population.

The second delimitation occurred during phase 1 in which churches must meet the definition for revitalization to be included in the population. The definition includes three criteria:[11]

1. In 2011, the congregation had declined 10 percent or more in worship attendance as compared to 2006 (five years prior) and in 2016 the congregation had grown 10 percent or more in worship attendance as compared to 2011 (five years prior).
2. From this group, churches will be excluded that had less than two of the last five years with one-year worship attendance growth of 10 percent or more or had less than two of the last five years with higher than a 20:1 worship-attendance-to-baptism ratio.
3. Finally, a church must have both two years of 10 percent worship attendance growth per year and a 20:1 baptism-to-worship-attendance ratio or better.

Churches that met these three-criteria definition of revitalization served as the population of the study. This number of churches experiencing revitalization were used to calculate the percentage of SBC churches that were experiencing revitalization, plateaued, or declining (research questions 1 and 2).

The third delimitation occurred in phase 2 in which the list of churches experiencing revitalization was surveyed to produce a list of churches that emphasize mission as a contributing factor to revitalization. The specifics of the survey are provided below in the section on instrumentation and the entire survey is listed in appendix "Revitalization Survey". It was anticipated that the results would yield a 95 percent

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[11] This definition of revitalization was determined by the larger research group in consultation with the group's doctoral thesis supervisor. See also Thom Rainer, *Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 20-21. Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson use the 10 percent increase in attendance. Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville: B&H, 2007), xiii. Joseph Stephen Hudson defines plateaued and declining churches as churches that have maintained an average attendance growth rate less than or equal to 5 percent over at least a five-year period. Joseph Stephen Hudson, "A Competency Model for Church Revitalization in Southern Baptist Convention Churches: A Mixed Methods Study" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 8. See also Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville: B&H, 2016); Albert R. Mohler Jr., ed., *A Guide to Church Revitalization* (Louisville, KY: SBTS Press, 2015). Both authors provide a similar picture of declining criteria.

confidence level and a 5 percent confidence interval. Once the survey collection was completed, the criteria for inclusion into the sample of *mission* churches was applied to the survey responses.

To be included in the list of churches that emphasize mission as a contributing factor to revitalization, a church must meet the following criteria:

Complete and submit the survey

1. On question 6, answer "Yes"[12]
2. On question 8, rate "Mission" as "Important," or "Highly Important,"[13]
3. On question 18, provide an answer that describes how changes in the church's missions ministry contributed to revitalization,[14] OR
4. On question 20, rate either bulleted statement as "Agree," or "Strongly Agree,"[15] OR
5. On question 21, rate "Missional Focus" as "Highly Important" or "Important" or "Slightly Important."[16]

The product of this delimitation was a list of churches that emphasized mission as a contributing factor to revitalization. This list will provide the answer to research question 3.[17] The participants for the qualitative strand of the study were selected from this list in

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[12] Question 6: "Are you willing to participate in a follow up interview regarding the revitalization process at your church? (Yes, No.)"

[13] Question 8: "Rate each ministry emphasis (discipleship, evangelism, leadership, mission, prayer, primary worship gathering, other) as to the importance it played in the revitalization process. (Highly Unimportant, Unimportant, Slightly Unimportant, Slightly Important, Important, Highly Important.)"

[14] Question 18: "Briefly describe the primary changes to the church's missions ministry which you perceive have contributed significantly to the revitalization process."

[15] Question 20: "Select your level of agreement with the following statements concerning the current church's mission ministry. (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree.) a. The church has a vibrant missions ministry focused on financially supporting short-term and/or long-term missionaries. b. The church has a vibrant missions ministry focused on sending short-term and/or long-term missionaries from its own membership."

[16] Question 21: "Indicate how important each of the following leadership practices have been in the revitalization process in your ministry context. (Highly Unimportant, Unimportant, Slightly Unimportant, Slightly Important, Important, Highly Important.)"

[17] The answer to research question 3 (number of churches that experienced revitalization who listed discipleship as a significant fact in the revitalization process) was calculated as a percentage based on

the next phase.

The final delimitation occurred in phase 2 in which the list of churches emphasizing mission as a contributing factor to revitalization were reduced to produce the sample for inclusion in phase 3 of the study. Initially, a respondent must have agreed to participate in a follow up interview (question 6 on the survey) to be eligible for the sample. This purposeful selection employed maximal variation to produce a diverse sample based on the demographic categories of church context (rural, suburban, urban, and church size.)[18] This delimitation produced a potential list of twelve churches that were invited to participate in the qualitative strand of the study in phase 3 (semi-structured interviews).[19] The data analysis of the phase 3 qualitative interviews provided the answers to research questions 4, 5, and 6.

This section has detailed the delimitations of study and methods for sampling the population. The next section will identify the limits of generalization of the study beyond the population.

Limits of Generalization

The population and sample were derived from SBC churches in North America who had experienced revitalization. The quantitative attributes are generalized to SBC

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the number of churches that experienced revitalization (from the second delimitation).

[18] Creswell states,

> This approach consists of determining in advance some criteria that differentiate the sites or participants, and then selecting sites or participants that are quite different on the criteria. This approach is often selected because when a researcher maximizes differences at the beginning of the study, it increases the likelihood that the findings will reflect differences or different perspectives—an ideal in qualitative research. (Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 156-57)

[19] The number of recommended participants in qualitative phenomenological interviews varies from author to author, but consensus between authors is a sample size between five and twenty-five participants. The key is for all participants to have the experienced the same phenomenon. Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 11th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2016), 255; Creswell and Plano Clark, *Mixed Methods Research*, 186; Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 155.

churches experiencing revitalization.[20] The qualitative attributes are only generalized to the participants in phase 3 of the research. While there may be limitations in direct application of these findings, depending on the cultural context of a given church, the combined quantitative and qualitative findings may be transferable to other church contexts due to the commonality of mission themes and practices. These themes and practices are generally mirrored in other evangelical congregations beyond SBC churches.

Research Instrumentation

This study employed two primary data collection instruments.[21] During phase 2 of the quantitative strand, the research team administered an online survey.[22] During phase 3 in the qualitative strand, I administered interviews. The following sections detail the content and rationale for each instrument.

Church Revitalization Survey

Phase 2 in the quantitative strand employed a survey as the data collection instrument. The purpose of the survey was twofold: (1) to provide an answer to research question 3 ("Of those SBC churches experiencing revitalization, what percentage emphasized mission in the process of revitalization?"), and (2) to provide churches who self-identified mission as an integral part of revitalization from which the sample for phase 3 in the quantitative strand was drawn. The details of the Church Revitalization Survey follow.

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[20] Creswell and Plano Clark, *Mixed Methods Research*, 9.

[21] The church revitalization survey can be found in appendix 1, and the mission interviews can be found in appendix 2.

[22] Paper surveys were also mailed out to those churches that did not initially complete the only survey.

Design. The research team chose a self-administered, Survey Monkey web survey as the mode for delivery and collection of data.[23] This design allowed for three advantages. First, using a website survey service leveraged technology for question sequencing and skip logic.[24] Second, data collection was automatic, and a certain amount of data analysis was queried via the website. Last, the speed of collection provided a significant saving in terms of time.[25]

Content. The survey consisted of thirty-two questions in ten sections (see appendix 1 for specific questions). The first section was comprised of six demographic questions related to the role the respondent held with the church in relation to the revitalization. The second section contained a question for contact information. The third section covered the revitalization process in general with three questions. Sections 4-9 consisted of questions relating to the specific factors that may have contributed to the revitalization (discipleship, evangelism, missions, leadership, prayer, and worship.) The final section provided an open-ended field for general comments.

Section 6 of the survey focused specifically on mission. Each item addressed a unique facet of mission in relation to the revitalization process and was drawn from the research questions or precedent literature. Item 18 was an open-ended question, while items 19 and 20 used six-point Likert rating scales.[26]

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[23] For additional information about Survey Monkey, please see https://surveymonkey.com.

[24] Lesley Andres clarifies, "Web surveys have the advantage of being able to program skip questions so that that the respondent is automatically directed to the next relevant question." Lesley Andres, *Designing & Doing Survey Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 86.

[25] Andres, *Designing & Doing Survey Research*, 50-51. Three disadvantages also accompany a self-directed web survey. First, because the link to the survey will be embedded in an email invitation, churches without accurate or complete email information will not receive the invitation. Second, self-administered surveys inherently include an inability for respondents to ask follow-up or clarification questions. Last, the most qualified person to complete the survey may not receive the invitation or be the one actually responding.

[26] All questions with rating scales have no midpoint. The nature of the question recommends that respondents choose a side. According to Andres, "If there is no midpoint, individuals are not allowed to sit on the fence." Andres, *Designing & Doing Survey Research*, 74.

Administration. The entire research team participated in collecting data for the survey. Collection protocol occurred as follows:

1. The research team divided the list of churches that experienced revitalization. Each member was assigned a number of churches to check and validate contact information. This check was accomplished through website searches.

2. An email invitation (appendix 3) was sent to the primary email address of the church (either the general office email or the pastor, if available). The email invitation explained the purpose of the survey and included a link to access the survey via a web browser. For an incentive, respondents who submitted the response within seven days, and agreed to a follow-up interview, were entered into a drawing for a $250 gift card.

3. Follow-up phone calls were placed by the research team to churches that did not respond after seven days. Hard copies of the survey were made available for churches that do not have email or internet access. Churches that did not respond after another 30-day waiting period were mailed a hardcopy with a return envelope.

Validation and reliability. First, the survey was submitted to an expert panel for feedback and approval. The expert panel included experienced church revitalizers, denominational leaders, and researchers in the field.[27] Second, the survey was field tested among the research team and select pastors to ensure deliverability, functionality, and clarity.

Mission Interviews

Phase 3 in the qualitative strand employed semi-structured recorded interviews as the data collection instrument.[28] Whereas the Revitalization Survey was conducted with the entire research team, the mission interviews were conducted individually. The

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[27] The expert panel consisted of Mark Clifton, Senior Director of Replanting/Revitalization for the North American Mission Board (NAMB) of the SBC and author of *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville: B&H, 2016); Brian Croft, Senior Fellow at the Mathena Center for Church Revitalization and author of *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying & Divided Churches*, 2016; Andrew M. Davis, author of *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017); Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation, revitalization pastors and co-authors of *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville: B&H, 2012); and Joseph Stephen Hudson, author of "A Competency Model for Church Revitalization in Southern Baptist Convention Churches: A Mixed Methods Study" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017).

[28] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 160.

purpose of the interviews was to collect data to formulate answers to research question 4 ("In what ways does transforming the mission culture contribute to church revitalization?"), research question 5 ("What changes to the church's organizational culture facilitated effective mission culture?"), and research question 6 ("What mission principles, priorities, and best practices can be identified for use in other revitalization contexts?"). The specifics of the mission interviews follow.

Content. The phase 3 qualitative interview questions combined demographic information and open-ended questions (see appendix 2).[29] The first section consisted of six demographic questions. The second section asked twelve questions related to mission and revitalization. Each of the open-ended questions related to one or more research questions. Table 2 displays the correlation of the phase 3 qualitative interview questions to research questions.

Table 2. Qualitative research questions and interview questions

Research Question	Corresponding Interview Questions
4. In what ways does transforming the mission culture contribute to church revitalization?	1, 9, 10, 11
5. What changes to the church's organizational culture facilitated effective mission culture?	2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8
6. What mission principles, priorities, and best practices can be identified for use in other revitalization contexts?	3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 12

[29] The interview questions in appendix 2 consisted of anticipated questions. However, the nature of the explanatory mixed-method design anticipated some adjustment in the qualitative strand based on the analysis of the quantitative strand. As Creswell and Plano Clark state,

> The researcher connects to a second phase . . . by identifying specific quantitative results that call for additional explanation and using these results to guide the development of the qualitative strand. Specifically, the researcher develops or refines the qualitative research questions, purposeful sampling procedures, and data collection protocols so they follow from the quantitative results. As such, the qualitative phase depends on the quantitative results. (Creswell and Plano Clark, *Mixed Methods Research*, 83)

Administration. The timeline for each interview included seven points of contact between me and the participant. The following list describes all points of contact:

1. An initial email alerting the participant to the initial phone call.
2. Phone call to set up the interview.
3. Email containing the list of questions and video instructions along with confirmation of the interview time.
4. Video interview.
5. Thank you email with instructions for transcript verification.
6. Email containing the interview transcript.

Each interview was conducted according to the following protocols.[30]

1. The interview was facilitated using Zoom video conferencing software that allowed for recording the entire interview either through video or phone.[31] Permission for recording was gained from the participant.
2. Read the informed consent statement and asked the participant to agree.
3. Conducted the interview.
4. Thanked the participate and previewed the remaining points of contact.
5. Informed the participant of the transcript validation process.
6. Informed the participant of the preliminary interpretation validation process.

Following the interview, the data was processed according to the following protocols.

1. Each interview was transcribed.
2. Each interview was coded using emerging codes and themes from the precedent literature.

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[30] The interview protocol sequence is adapted from Stacy A. Jacob and S. Paige Furgerson, "Writing Interview Protocols and Conducting Interviews: Tips for Students New to the Field of Qualitative Research," *Qualitative Report* 17, no. 6 (2012): 7-10.

[31] For additional information about Zoom meeting software, please see https://zoom.us.

3. The qualitative data was analyzed into themes: themes that are centered around the content and ideas contained in the research questions.[32]

Validation and reliability. Six specific protocols were followed to ensure validation and reliability in this phase of the study. First, the interview questions were submitted to an expert panel for feedback and approval.

Second, I kept a research journal of each step taken with dated entries, completed tasks, and observations. Third, both the interview content and process were triangulated through supervisor and peer reviews. Members of the research team audited the content and process, along with the project supervisor. Fourth, a pilot interview was conducted to ensure the video software and transcription process work properly.

The fifth protocol involved member checking.[33] This process began with interview participants being given the opportunity to review their interview transcripts to ensure accuracy. After the interview was transcribed, each participant was provided a transcript to review and correct. After ten days, if no revisions were recommended by the participant, I proceeded with the understanding that the transcripts were accurate and valid. Second, the preliminary interpretation of the study was provided to interview participants for their reflection and feedback. As with the interview protocol, a period of ten days was allowed for responses regarding the preliminary interpretation.

The final protocol involved clarifying researcher bias.[34] I acknowledge three primary areas where bias had the potential to influence the interpretation of the data. First, I am a student at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and a member of an

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[32] Creswell notes, "Themes in qualitative research (also called categories) are broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea." Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 186.

[33] Creswell explains, "In member checking, the researcher solicits participants' views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations. This technique is considered to be the most critical technique for establishing credibility." Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 252.

[34] Creswell states, "In this clarification, the researcher comments on past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach to the study." Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 251.

SBC church. Second, I currently serve as a pastor with almost fifteen years of experience in various ministry roles. Lastly, I have served in both small and medium sized church environments.

Research Procedures

The methodology for this research project was reviewed and approved by the ethics committee of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary prior to any surveys or interviews conducted with human participants.[35] A risk assessment profile was created for research involving human subjects, as well as the assessment of risk to human subjects in research. All interview participants were provided an informed consent statement before participating in an interview.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the purpose and design of this explanatory sequential mixed methods study. The following chapters will detail the findings of the study. Chapter 5 will address conclusions of the research.

[35] All research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with, and approved by, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the research project.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to investigate how transforming the mission culture of the church led to revitalization in churches of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). This chapter discusses the compilation protocol, findings, summary of research, answers to research questions, details concerning both quantitative and qualitative data, summary of findings, and strengths and challenges of the research design.

Compilation Protocol

This research engaged a participant-selection variation of the explanatory sequential mixed methods design.[1] Data collection began by contacting Lifeway Research in order to obtain the Annual Church Profile (ACP) data on SBC churches. All churches that were selected for the second phase met the following criteria: (1) the church reported ACP data for 2006-2016; (2) the church experienced 10 percent or greater decline in worship attendance over the five-year period prior to the turnaround; and (3) the church experienced at least 10 percent annual growth in worship attendance for at least two out of five years following the turnaround while maintaining a 20:1 worship-attendance-to-baptism ration during those same years. A total of 716 churches met these criteria and were invited to participate in the phase 2 survey (see appendix 1). The survey was administered through mailed hard copies with return envelopes and postage provided as well as electronically through email invitation. The churches were invited to

[1] Seven doctoral research students, under the supervision of Michael Wilder and Danny Bowen, conducted the research protocol for phases 1 and 2. The students worked together by dividing the duties to develop, compile, and analyze the data collected in phases 1 and 2.

participate in, and electronically submit, a survey that consisted of twenty-four questions and items directly related to church revitalization and eight additional questions related to the demographics of the church.

Selection for participation in phase 3 interviews included the following requirements: (1) the participant completed and submitted a survey; (2) the participant rated "Mission" as "Important" or "Highly Important" to the revitalization process; (3) the participant listed specific practices or changes in mission culture that led to revitalization; (4) the church leader selected "Mission focus" as a "Highly Important" or "Important" leadership focus; and (5) the church leaders represent a diversity of congregational sizes, geography, and ministry context. Interviews with selected church leaders were conducted by Zoom meeting (i.e., a video conference), when possible, and by a recorded phone call.[2] I recorded each interview, which was later transcribed. I then analyzed and appropriately coded the transcripts with NVivo software in order to identify principles and trends from the revitalized churches and their leaders.[3] A detailed description of the protocol and participants of each phase follows.

Phase 1 Delimitations

Phase 1 data collection began with a request to Lifeway Research to obtain Annual Church Profile (ACP) data on SBC churches. In order to be eligible for participation in phase 1, churches must have submitted ACP data for 2006-2016. In 2016, 28,046 churches provided sufficient data to be considered for inclusion in the study.[4] This

[2] For additional information about Zoom meeting software, see https://zoom.us. For those church leaders who did not have the technological capacity to utilize zoom software, I utilized a call recording application on the iPhone named Tapeacall. For more information on Tapeacall, see https://www.tapeacall.com/.

[3] For additional information on NVivo software, see https://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo.

[4] This number of churches eligible for this study accounts for around 59.3 percent of SBC churches that submitted sufficient data to be considered for participation in the study. The total number of churches reported as participating in the SBC in 2016 was 47,272. Carol Pipes, "ACP: Churches up in 2016: Baptisms, Membership Decline," *Baptist Press*, June 8, 2017, http://www.bpnews.net/49005/acp--churches-up-in-2016-baptisms-membership-decline.

initial data was obtained in June 2018. In analyzing the five-year worship attendance records of those 28,046 churches, 25.60 percent (7,180) were growing, 25.71 percent (7,211) were plateaued, and 48.69 percent (13,656) were declining. Only churches that were in need of revitalization were eligible for participation (declining or plateaued churches). Researchers eliminated the growing churches and plateaued churches (14,391) in order to focus on those churches that were in most need of revitalization (i.e., declining churches). This decision left a population of 13,656 (48.69 percent) for the research.

After this number of eligible churches had been determined, the researchers applied the next delimitation of specific criteria, looking at the decline and growth rates of the churches. At this point, criteria 1 and 2 for being considered a "revitalized" church were applied. This first step in the second delimitation inspected the decline and growth rates of the church. For the first criterion, a church must have declined 10 percent or more in worship attendance in 2001 as compared to 2006 and grown 10 percent or more in worship attendance in 2016 compared to 2011. The second criterion excluded churches that had less than two of the last five years with a one-year attendance growth of 10 percent or more or had less than two of the last five years with 20:1 or higher attendance-to-baptism ratio. This delimitation left 3,364 churches eligible to continue in the research.

The final delimitation in phase 1 applied a third criterion for the church to be considered a "revitalized" church. This third criterion excluded churches that did not have both two years of 10 percent worship-attendance growth per year and a 20:1 or better baptism-to-attendance ratio. This final delimitation identified 716 churches (5.24 percent of previously declining population) that met the criteria of revitalization and eligibility for phase 2 of the research.[5] Utilizing these criteria isolated the churches who

[5] Of the 28,046 churches with sufficient data related to 2011-2016 worship attendance trends, 48.69 percent (13,656) also demonstrated a decline in worship attendance of at least 10 percent during those same years. The research sample was identified from among these declining churches because they represented the most significant trend reversals that resulted in revitalization. The research team believed that the principles identified by studying these formerly declining churches would be helpful to all

were in decline yet still revitalized to give researchers the opportunity to observe the most extreme cases of revitalization.

Phase 2 Delimitations and Protocol

For phase 2, the 716 "revitalized" churches were invited to participate in a survey (see appendix 1). The research team divided up the sample of 716 churches in order to verify contact information. The researchers then sent an email (see appendix 2) to the 716 churches, proving an invitation to participate in a survey on church revitalization in June 2018. The email invitation provided a link to the survey instrument, and an incentive was offered to each participant who completed the survey within seven days and agreed to participate in a follow-up interview (if selected). After this initial seven-day period, researchers attempted to contact the churches that had not responded to the initial email invitation in order to solicit their participation. Paper copies of the survey were also made available to church leaders who had indicated that they did not use email for communication. Once participation slowed, the researches called non-responsive churches again to solicit more participation in the survey. As of September 13, 2018, after repeated emails and phone calls to encourage more response, 129 churches had responded to the survey with a confidence interval of 7.82.[6] At that time, the team

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churches, including those that were plateaued or growing. The resulting sample of 716 churches represented 5.24 percent of the declining church population (13,656).

[6] The research team was comprised of students from three different cohorts of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary who began their studies in 2016, 2017, and 2018. Because the 2016 cohort would graduate earlier, two of the students finalized their projects at this point of the study. The remaining students in the 2017 and 2018 cohorts continued to solicit more participants for the phase 2 survey in an attempt to raise the confidence level. For the 2016 cohort results, see Christopher Michael Aiken, "Church Revitalization and the Role of Pastoral Leadership: A Mixed Methods Study" (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018); Aaron Thomas Colyer, "Church Revitalization and Evangelistic Emphasis: A Mixed Methods Study" (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018). For 2017 cohort results see Dean C. Clark, "Transforming the Prayer Culture in Church Revitalizations: A Mixed Methods Study," (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019); Brian C. Legg, "Transforming the Discipleship Culture in Church Revitalization: A Mixed-Methods Study," (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019); Donald R. Sanders, "Transforming the Leadership Development Culture in Church Revitalizations: A Mixed Methods Study," (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019).

decided to further limit the sample to churches with worship attendance greater than fifty people in 2016.[7] This additional delimitation resulted in a population of 466 churches.

To encourage more responses to the phase 2 survey and to raise the confidence level, the research team sent paper copies of the survey with a postage paid return envelope to the 466 churches in April 2019. This distribution was followed up with additional attempts to call and email church leaders to encourage the completion of the survey. The final number of completed surveys was 145 out of the 466 potential respondents. This resulted in a confidence level of 6.71.

The survey instrument consisted of eight demographic questions and twenty-four questions related to aspects of revitalization, including discipleship, evangelism, leadership, missions, prayer, and the primary worship gathering (see appendix 1). An expert panel of pastors and denominational leaders with expertise in church revitalization provided review, insight, and feedback for the survey questions.[8] The research team chose different churches that met their selected criteria and made efforts to avoid overlapping church leaders in the interview process.[9]

Using the 145 survey responses, a third delimitation produced a list of

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[7] The team decided to exclude churches with fifty or less due to the small numeric threshold needed to achieve an increase or decrease. For example, a few people's leaving or joining the church could change the designation from declining to growing.

[8] The expert panel consisted of Mark Clifton, Senior Director of Replanting/Revitalization for the North American Mission Board (NAMB) of the SBC and author of *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville: B&H, 2016); Brian Croft, Senior Fellow at the Mathena Center for Church Revitalization and author of *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying & Divided Churches*, 2016; Andrew M. Davis, author of *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017); Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation, revitalization pastors and co-authors of *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville: B&H, 2012); and Joseph Stephen Hudson, author of "A Competency Model for Church Revitalization in Southern Baptist Convention Churches: A Mixed Methods Study" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017).

[9] Team members from the 2017 and 2018 cohorts provided the remaining team members with a list of the pastors whom they interviewed. The remaining team members then submitted their interview choices to one another and compared the results for overlap. If overlap occurred, then the team members negotiated between themselves for particular pastors to interview or contacted the pastor to determine whether he would mind being interviewed by more than one researcher.

churches that emphasized mission culture development in the revitalization process. From this group, churches must have met one of four criteria: (1) rated "Missions" as "Important" or "Highly Important" on item 8, (2) provided an answer that described how changes in the church's "missions ministry" contributed to revitalization on item 18, (3) showed a significant shift on either item 19 to item 20 from a pre-revitalization stance of "Strongly Disagree" or "Disagree" to a post-revitalization stance of "Agree" or "Strongly Agree," and (4) indicated on item 22 that a missional focus leadership practice was "Highly Important" or "Important."[10] This delimitation produced a list of 23 churches that met the criteria for a "mission culture" church. Table 3 illustrates the delimitation and sampling of the study.

Table 3. Delimitations and sampling survey

Phase	Delimitation	Description	Number
1	1	Total SBC churches in 2016	47,272
1	1	Churches with sufficient data	28,046
1	1	Declining Churches	13,656

[10] Survey item 8: "Rate each ministry emphasis as to the importance it played in the revitalization process. (Highly Unimportant, Unimportant, Slightly Unimportant, Slightly Important, Important, Highly Important.)" The ministry choices were discipleship, evangelism, leadership, missions, prayer, primary worship gathering, other.

Survey item 18: "Briefly describe the primary changes to the church's missions ministry which you perceive have contributed significantly to the revitalization process (open-text response)."

Survey item 19: "Select your level of agreement with the following statements concerning the church's missions ministry prior to the revitalization process. (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree.) a. The church had a vibrant missions ministry focused on financially supporting short-term and/or long-term missionaries. b. The church had a vibrant missions ministry focused on sending short-term and/or long-term missionaries from its own membership."

Survey item 20: "Select your level of agreement with the following statements concerning the church's current missions ministry. (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree.) a. The church had a vibrant missions ministry focused on financially supporting short-term and/or long term missionaries. b. The church had a vibrant missions ministry focused on sending short-term and/or long-term missionaries from its own membership."

Survey item 22: "Indicate how important each of the following leadership practices have been in the revitalization process in your ministry context. (Highly Unimportant, Unimportant, Slightly Unimportant, Slightly Important, Important, Highly Important.) a. Building Momentum b. Conceptual Thinking c. Contextual Awareness and Planning d. Developing Others e. Getting Members Engaged f. Gospel Orientation g. Individual and Corporate Repentance h. Information Seeking i. Initiative j. Interpersonal Understanding k. Missional Focus l. Organizational Awareness m. Relationship Building n. Teamwork and Cooperation o. Transparency p. Willingness to Confront/Church Discipline."

Phase	Delimitation	Description	Number
1	2	Plateaued Churches	7,211
2	2	Met revitalization criteria 1 and 2	3,364
1	2	Met revitalization criterion 3	716
2	3	Worship attendance >50	466
2	3	Responded to phase 2 survey	145
2	4	Met mission culture criteria	23
2	4	Purposeful maximal variation sample	12

Phase 3 Delimitations and Protocol

"Mission culture" qualitative interviews began by contacting the 23 churches purposely selected from phase 2 who indicated a willingness to participate in further research. Prior to beginning the interviews, I conducted a pilot interview in order to ensure that the questions were understandable to the audience and that the technology for the interviews was feasible for the participants to operate.[11] The pilot interview also helped test the feasibility of the transcription and feedback protocols.

Pastors and church leaders from 12 churches representing diverse experience levels, church size, education, job roles, and geographic locations were purposefully selected for interviews.

Initially, an email invitation was sent to 14 selected church leaders across the US according to the previously noted selection criteria. Initially, 10 church leaders responded to the email, and interviews were scheduled. Follow-up phone calls were made, which secured an additional 2 church leaders from the initial email distribution. After several more attempts, 2 more interviews were set up for a total count of 12 interviews.

Upon scheduling an interview appointment, I sent each interviewee an email

[11] The pilot interview participant was Kieron Sharpe, Care and Counseling Pastor of Tequesta's First Baptist Church, Tequesta, Florida.

containing the implied consent statement (see appendix 3) as well as the interview outline, questions, and instructions on how to login into the video interview (i.e., Zoom meeting).

The interviews were conducted using several different platforms that were dependent on the technological capability of the interviewee. Out of the 12 interviews, 8 were performed via Zoom video, 1 was conducted via Zoom audio, and 3 were conducted via recorded telephone calls. The interview timeframe lasted from 20 to 55 minutes.[12] Nine interviews were recorded using the Zoom video-conferencing service, and 3 interviews were recorded through the Tapeacall service. The interview audio was then transcribed using Temi.[13]

Following the interview and transcription process, the interview participants were emailed a copy of the transcription of their interview for validation. None of the participants suggested any modifications to their transcript. The transcripts were then coded using the research questions, precedent literature, and emerging themes via NVivo software. After the interviews were analyzed, the interviewees were sent an email containing the preliminary conclusions with instructions for verification.

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[12] The interview was broken into two distinct parts with the first being demographic questions and the second focusing on the mission culture of the church. See appendix 2 for interview questions. Around seven hours of audio recordings were collected, which were transcribed and coded; however, due to the sensitive nature of the information shared at times, the transcriptions were not made part of this thesis. Phase 3 interview participants were asked to provide candid responses to specific questions about their church and its revitalization. At times, those responses related to personal leadership failures, missional challenges, moral failings among staff or members, relational conflict with specific church members, and other pastoral leadership crises. The nature of the participants' candor regarding these oftentimes embarrassing or painful incidents required a commitment of confidentiality to the participants that would not identify a pastor or his church with any particular answer. First, participant names, church names, and city locations of the participants were not included with the study. At times, direct quotations are used when deemed impactful. Otherwise, summaries of themes and responses are used. To ensure anonymity, any personally identifying information remains confidential. See Lesley Andres, *Designing & Doing Survey Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 130.

[13] Temi is an online based service that transfers audio files to text. After the automated transcription, I was required to go through each generated transcription and edit the transcript with the original audio. For more information on Temi, see temi.com.

Phase 2 Participant Demographics

Phase 2 consisted of a survey instrument sent to churches experiencing revitalization to determine what factors influenced their revitalization work. Pastors were the targeted audience of the phase 2 survey. There was no administrative protocol that prevented non-pastors from completing the survey in phase 2, as some churches may have been without a pastor at the time, or another staff member or volunteer may have been better suited to provide the necessary information. Phase 3 interviews were limited to church staff members in order to provide a continuity of perspective.

Table 4. Phase 2 respondents' current roles[14]

Role	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Pastor/elder	133	94.32
Staff	6	4.25
Deacon	1	0.70
Volunteer	1	0.70
Total	141	

Note: Four of the 145 respondents did not answer this item.

The respondents were also asked about their roles prior to and during the revitalization process (see table 5). About one-half of the respondents (47.14 percent) indicated that they served in the role of pastor prior to the period of revitalization, and almost 90 percent indicated that they were serving as the pastor during the revitalization process. However, 44 percent of the respondents reported not being at the church prior to revitalization, which indicates that the change in leadership that brought them to the church was perhaps part of the change that led to revitalization. A small number of participants were on staff prior to and during the revitalization.

[14] Survey item 1: "Your current role with your church: pastor/elder, deacon, staff, or volunteer."

Table 5. Phase 2 respondents' roles related to revitalization[15]

	Respondents	Role prior to revitalization (%)	Respondents	Role during revitalization (%)
Pastor/elder	66	47.14	127	89.36
Deacon	--	--	1	0.70
Staff	10	7.14	9	6.38
Volunteer	2	1.42	1	0.70
Not at church	62	44.28	3	2.12
Total	140		141	

Note: Five of the 145 respondents did not answer this item.

To gain understanding on the ministry context in which the respondents were leading and serving, they were asked to classify their ministry context as rural, suburban, or urban (see table 6). The majority were rural (53.19 percent) and served in a rural context, over one-third (36.17 percent) were from a suburban context, and only 10.36 percent were classified as urban.

Table 6. Phase 2 respondents' ministry context[16]

Context	Number of respondents	Ministry context (%)
Rural	75	53.19
Suburban	51	36.17
Urban	15	10.63
Total	141	

Note: Four of the 145 respondents did not answer this item.

[15] Survey item 2: "Your role prior to the revitalization process: pastor/elder, deacon, staff, volunteer, or not at the church."
Survey item 3: "Your role during the revitalization process: pastor/elder, deacon, staff, volunteer, or not at the church."

[16] Survey item 4: "Your church context is best described as: rural, suburban, or urban."

Phase 3 Participants

The final delimitation occurred at the end of phase 2. Fourteen "mission culture" churches were purposefully selected employing maximal variation in order to produce a diverse sample based on demographic categories of church context. This delimitation produced a list of 12 churches that provided the sample for phase 3. Table 3 illustrates the delimitations and sampling of the study.

The demographics for phase 3 participant churches varied widely (see table 7). The participants represented a large portion of small, medium, and large SBC churches, single and multi-site SBC churches, and SBC churches from diverse ministry contexts. The phase 3 churches represented 8 different states in 4 different regions of the United States. Eight of the 12 churches were in suburban settings, 3 were in rural settings, and 1 identified as being in an urban setting. Ten of the churches employed a one-campus approach to ministry, while 2 churches were multi-site.[17]

The churches were also diverse in worship-attendance dynamics. The worship attendance ranged from 90 to 2000. Seven of the churches had attendance under 250, while 5 had attendance greater than 650. Eight of the 12 churches showed an increase in attendance in 2020 verses 2016, while four churches declined during the same period. Five of the churches experienced significant growth from the time of the survey in 2016 to the time of the interviews in 2020. Three of the churches grew by 60 percent, while two churches doubled in worship attendance.

[17] One multi-site church had two campuses, while the other multi-site church had three. One of the single-site churches had what they considered "multi-venue worship." The pastor of this church explained that their leadership was "trying to create venues that relate to heartbeats or stages or life or uniqueness." They are creating worship services that looked at the audience culture and adapted to that culture. At the point of the interview, they had two worship venues that had a distinct worship "feel" but the same message or teaching. They were aiming to add a third worship venue in the near future.

Table 7. Phase 3 church participation profile[18]

ID	Ministry Context	State	Single Campus (S) or Multisite (M)	Region by US Census Division	ACP Worship Attendance (2016)	Self-Reported Worship Attendance (2020)[19]
1	Suburban	GA	S	South Atlantic	180	170
2	Suburban	FL	M	South Atlantic	1309	2000
3	Rural	OK	S	West South Central	81	100
4	Suburban	GA	S	South Atlantic	800	1600
5	Suburban	MS	S	East South Central	193	160
6	Suburban	OK	S*	West South Central	516	750
7	Urban	TX	S	West South Central	452	650
8	Rural	TN	S	East South Central	97	125
9	Suburban	NC	S	South Atlantic	260	250
10	Suburban	TN	M	East South Central	400	800
11	Rural	TN	S	East South Central	100	90
12	Suburban	AK	S	Pacific	120	200

Note: Church 6 was single-site but had multiple venues for the worship services.

[18] The US Census Bureau divides the country into four regions: Northeast, Midwest, South, and West. Each region is further divided into divisions. The diversity of ministry contexts cannot be adequately represented by four regions. Therefore, the regional divisions are provided for further geographical dispersion. "Census Division," accessed May 1, 2020, https://www.easidemographics.com/mdbhelp/html/census_division_1.htm. The ACP Worship Attendance (2016) is from the ACP report. The Self-Reported Worship Attendance (2020) is a self-reported number provided during each interview. Interview demographic item 6: "Describe your church (size, demographics, etc.)"

[19] This number was reported by participants on interview demographic item 6: "Describe your church (size, demographics, etc.)." The interviews were conducted in February 2020.

Twelve church leaders participated in the phase 3 interviews.[20] The interviewees represented a wide range of experience and age (see table 8). They averaged just over 20 years of ministry experience, ranging from 10 to 38 years of total ministry experience. The participants also averaged just under 7 years of tenure at their current church, ranging from 2 to 15 years of total tenure. The age of the participants averaged almost 47 years, with a range of 34 to 62.

The education level of the participants varied between minimal college and doctorate degrees. Three of the church leaders had doctorates (all three had Doctor of Ministry degrees). Two of the church leaders were bi-vocational (one was a human resource contractor, and the other homeschooled her children).[21] The church leaders also held a variety of staff roles (see table 10). Ten of the church leaders were lead/senior pastors, one was an executive pastor, and one was a church administrator/missions director.[22]

Table 8. Phase 3 church leaders' age and experience[23]

	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Mean	Median
Ministry Experience	10	38	27	20.88	20
Tenure in Church	2	15	13	6.5	7
Church Leader's Age	34	62	28	46.92	44.5

[20] The six other researchers limited their interviews to pastors; however, there was one participant in this study who did not operate in the office or role of a pastor but did operate in a church staff position.

[21] The lead pastor of the interviewee who did not operate in the role of a pastor was also bi-vocational.

[22] The same church leader filled out the survey and completed the qualitative interview.

[23] Interview demographic item 2: "How many years have you been in ministry? How many years did you serve prior to the revitalization?"
Interview demographic item 3: "How many years have you served in your current role?"
Interview demographic item 5: "What is your current age?"

Table 9. Phase 3 church leaders' education[24]

Educational level	Count	Percentage (%)
Some College	1	8.33
Bachelors	3	25
Some Masters	2	16.67
Masters	3	25
Doctorate	3	25

Table 10. Phase 3 church leaders' staff position at church

Church Staff Position	Count	Percentage (%)
Lead/Senior Pastor	10	83.33
Executive Pastor	1	8.33
Church Administrator/Missions Coordinator	1	8.33

Findings

The findings from the research in phases 2 and 3 are reported below. Phase 2 shows the results from the quantitative survey with a distinctive focus on mission. Phase 3 shows the results from the qualitative interviews of purposely selected church leaders, focusing on their experience with how transforming the mission culture of the church affected the revitalization in their church.

Phase 2

Phase 2 research consisted of a survey instrument sent to churches experiencing revitalization to determine what factors influenced their "turnaround" ministry. The survey instrument employed in phase 2 collected demographic data on the respondents (reported in the previous section). Following the demographic section, the respondents were asked specific questions regarding six ministry areas: discipleship, evangelism, leadership, missions, prayer, and the primary worship gathering. This

[24] Interview demographic item 4: "What is your training and educational background?"

specific study focused on the mission section, while the other studies in the larger project investigated the other six areas. The mission section consisted of five items related to the role of missions in the revitalization process as well as one final question related to giving advice to anyone wanting to lead a church revitalization.

Survey items 8-10 focused on the revitalization process in general. Survey item 8 asked participants to rate each of the six ministry emphases on a six-point Likert scale as to the importance it played in their church's revitalization process (see table 11).

Table 11. Phase 2 ministry importance rating

Ministry Area	Highly Important and Important
Prayer	86.86
Primary Worship Gathering	90.51
Leadership	86.77
Discipleship	77.38
Evangelism	80.15
Missions	69.12

Note: All numbers are stated as a percentage.

Nearly 7 of 10 (69.12 percent) of the 145 church leaders who responded to the phase 2 survey rated mission as "Highly Important" or "Important" to their revitalization effort on the survey. While mission did rank lowest out of the six ministry areas in the amount of church leaders who selected it as "Highly Important" or "Important," this study has promoted a view of mission that is less a task or practice and more a lifestyle

and ecclesiology in tune with the *missio Dei*.[25] Mission ministry done in alignment with the *missio Dei* would undoubtedly include all of the other ministry elements. The phase 3 findings observed a more holistic church approach to mission that leads to revitalization.

Item 9 on the survey instrument asked, "Reflecting on the change initiatives you have pursued in your church revitalization context, identify the area in which you have face the greatest amount of member resistance." Out of the 145 church leaders who responded to this item, only slightly more than 8 percent indicated that the greatest area of member resistance came in the area of mission (see table 12). Evangelism (20.69 percent), discipleship (19.31 percent), leadership (19.31 percent), and changes to the primary worship gathering (17.24 percent) received the most resistance to the revitalization efforts of the church leaders.

Table 12. Resistance to change initiatives

Area	Indicating Greatest Resistance (%)
Evangelism	20.69
Discipleship	19.31
Leadership	19.31
Primary Worship Gathering	17.24
Missions	8.28
Prayer	4.14

Item 10 on the survey instrument asked, "Reflecting on the change initiatives you have pursued in your church revitalization context, identify the area in which you have faced the greatest amount of member acceptance." According to the survey, church

[25] When referencing the churches' "missions ministry," the survey only mentions financing and sending short-term and long-term missionaries. My goal with this wording was to push against the relegation of mission to a listing of specific practices and actions. I wonder whether this "task oriented" verbiage in the survey led to respondents' adopting a narrower view of mission than the research has promoted.

members were more open to mission initiatives than any other change initiative other than changes to the primary worship environment (see table 13). Almost 1 out of 5 church leaders indicated that mission initiatives received the greatest amount of receptivity in their congregation (19.31 percent). Prayer (11.72 percent) and evangelism (11.72 percent) were the selected the least by church leaders as the change initiatives that the congregation was most open to.

Table 13. Member acceptability of change initiatives

Area	Indicating Greatest Acceptance (%)
Primary Worship Gathering	21.38
Missions	19.31
Leadership	15.17
Discipleship	13.10
Prayer	11.72
Evangelism	11.72

Survey items 18-20 focused on the role of mission and mission culture in the revitalization process. Item 22 also investigated how leading with a missional focus impacted revitalization.[26] Item 18 asked respondents to describe the primary changes to the church's mission ministry that respondents perceive as contributing significantly to the revitalization process.[27] This question allowed for open-ended text responses. Several common threads were highlighted by this open-ended question.[28] The most common theme that surfaced was that the church leaders led their church into ministry in the

[26] Survey item 22: "Indicate how important each of the following leadership practices have been in the revitalization process in your ministry context." While item 22 was designed for the leadership and leadership development segment of the larger study, I believed the "Missional Focus" was of importance for this study on mission culture and revitalization.

[27] Survey item 18: "Briefly describe the primary changes to the church's missions ministry which you perceive have contributed significantly to the revitalization process."

[28] See table 14 for a complete list of themes.

surrounding community (47 responses; 21 percent). Financing mission initiatives through giving (33 responses; 17 percent) and leading short-term mission trips (31 responses; 14 percent) were other strong recurring themes.

Table 14. Phase 2 mission changes were that made to facilitate revitalization

Theme	Number of responses
Initiated ministry in the surrounding community	47
Financed mission through giving	33
Led short-term trips (domestic and international)	31
Initiated a mission promotion communication strategy	21
Formed partnerships with other churches	18
Led a re-focusing of mission engagement	16
Focused on getting people active	16
Led an international mission focus	8
Led a regional mission focus	5
Led directed prayer for mission	4
Led students into mission	4
Added mission leadership	4
Led small groups to own specific mission projects	3
Focus on mission in preaching	3
Led mission to a different ethnic group in community	3
Sent families into full-time mission	3
Trained members for mission	2
Change in worship music style	1
Started children's ministry	1
Total responses[29]	223

Item 19-20 aimed to capture how churches' missions ministry shifted and in their shifting affected the churches' revitalization.[30] Item 19 inquired on the status of the

[29] This item allowed for open-ended response, allowing respondents to have multiple responses and responses that mentioned several themes. Thus, each single theme or item was counted as an individual response.

[30] Survey item 19: "Select your level of agreement with the following statements concerning

churches' mission ministry prior to revitalization, and item 20 inquired on the status of respondents' current state of mission ministry at the time of the survey. In both prompts, the percentage of respondents who either "Agreed" or "Strongly Agreed" changed dramatically after revitalization. For question 19, the percentage of respondents who selected "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" to whether their church had a vibrant mission ministry that financed short-term and long term-trips jumped from 27.6 percent prior to revitalization to 60 percent at the time of the survey (see tables 15 and 16). For item 20, the percentage of respondents who selected "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" to whether their church had a vibrant mission ministry that sent members on short-term and long-term mission opportunities increased from 15.8 percent to 46.8 percent.

Table 15. Church's mission ministry status *prior* to revitalization (percentage)

Prompt	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	No Answer
Had vibrant missions ministry focused on the financial support of short-term tris or long-term missionaries	20.6	22	17.9	12.4	13.1	14.5	11.7

the church's missions ministry prior to the revitalization process. (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree.) a. The church had a vibrant missions ministry focused on financially supporting short-term and/or long term missionaries. b. The church had a vibrant missions ministry focused on sending short-term and/or long-term missionaries from its own membership."

Survey item 20: "Select your level of agreement with the following statements concerning the church's current missions ministry. (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree.) a. The church had a vibrant missions ministry focused on financially supporting short-term and/or long term missionaries. b. The church had a vibrant missions ministry focused on sending short-term and/or long-term missionaries from its own membership."

Prompt	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	No Answer
Had vibrant mission ministry focused on sending short-term trips or long-term missionaries from their own church	29	22.8	8.28	12.4	11	4.8	11.7

Table 16. Church's *current* mission ministry status (percentage)

Prompt	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	No Answer
Has vibrant missions ministry focused on the financial support of short-term tris or long-term missionaries	2	2.8	2.8	21.4	34.5	25.5	11
Has vibrant mission ministry focused on sending short-term trips or long-term missionaries from their own church	4.8	9	9.7	17.9	24.8	22	11.7

While survey item 22 dealt with general church leadership, there was a category of the question that asked respondents how important leading with a "mission focus" had been to their church's revitalization. Just over 65 percent of respondents

selected that leading with a "mission focus" was "Important" or "Highly Important" (see table 17).

Table 17. Leading with a "mission focus" to revitalization (percentage)

Highly Unimportant	Unimportant	Slightly Unimportant	Important	Highly Important
1.4	0	16.5	28.3	37.2

Note: Twenty-three respondents (15.9 percent) did not provide an answer.

The last question of the survey (item 32) was an open-ended item that gave church leaders the opportunity to give general advice to other church leaders who were attempting to lead church revitalization.[31] There were over 212 different responses to this question.[32] (see table 18).

Table 18. Phase 2 respondents' advice (survey item 32)

Theme	Responses	Frequency (%)
Prayer/fasting	37	17
Emphasizing strong preaching/teaching	23	11
Focus on slow organizational change	21	10
Love your people	17	8
Develop leaders	12	6
Invest in relationships	10	5
Love/exegete/engage/serve the community	8	4
Be persistent	8	4
Look to Scripture	7	3
Be ready for resistance	7	3

[31] Survey item 32: "What advice would you offer to a pastor seeking to lead a revitalization process? (open-ended)"

[32] Some respondents listed numerous themes, thus making the total amount of responses exceed the number of respondents.

Theme	Responses	Frequency (%)
Stay and do not leave	7	3
Trust God	6	3
Other	49	23
Total responses	212	

Phase 3

Twelve church leaders were interviewed for phase 3. The first set of questions consisted of demographic information; the findings are explained in the above sections. The second section of questions focused on how mission culture curation led to revitalization in the church. Questions included topics such as how the culture came to be, who was responsible for cultivating it, what obstacles were encountered, what practices were effective, what resources were helpful, and how mission culture development contributed to revitalization. After completing the interviews, the transcripts were coded to reflect the perspectives of the participants and then were developed into broader themes.[33] By coding these themes based off of response frequency in the interviews, I was able to derive best practices from the raw information that was presented in each interview. Through the qualitative interviews, thirteen recurring themes emerged from among the church leaders. A discussion of those thirteen themes follows (see table 19).

Table 19. Themes noted among interviewed church leaders

Theme	Description of Theme	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Leaders involved other key leaders in the mission culture formation process	12/12	100
2	Leaders worked intentionally to change the	11/12	92

[33] John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011), 208.

Theme	Description of Theme	Frequency	Percentage (%)
	mindset of the congregation		
3	Pastors utilized preaching to intentionally to change mission culture.	10/12	83
4	Leaders initiated ministry in their community	10/12	83
5	Leaders had an intentional communication strategy to highlight missions awareness	9/12	75
6	Leaders recognized a faithful few in their congregation whose hearts were warm to mission	7/12	58
7	Leaders invested in short-term mission trips	7/12	58
8	Leaders led their church to increase financing of mission	7/12	58
9	Leaders created ministry partnerships with other churches	6/12	50
10	Leaders utilized modeling and small group discipleship to warm hearts for mission.	5/12	42
11	Leaders communicated a raised level of member expectation	5/12	42
12	Leaders led focused prayer for mission	5/12	42
13	Leaders focused on moving toward more optimal church governance	5/12	42

Theme 1: Leaders involved other key leaders in the mission culture formation process. Seeking out, identifying, training, equipping, and releasing key leaders concerning the task of cultivating the mission culture in the revitalization of the church was the only theme found in all of the qualitative interviews. Church leaders realized that the presence and support of these "key leaders" was a sign of God's blessing on their church. Church leader 5 stated that "we've really been blessed to have the right people at the right time, some really sharp lay leaders."[34] According to church leader 10,

[34] Church leader 5, interview by author, Zoom video conference, February 7, 2020. All interviews were confidential; the names of the churches and their leaders are withheld by mutual agreement.

"getting some leaders in place who can help move the church forward" was an integral step in shifting the mission culture of the church.[35]

At times, the church leader was able to utilize key people who were already in the congregation, but in other instances, the church leader had to recruit new leaders with a fresh mindset. Church leader 4 stated that when he arrived at his church, several of the existing staff members were an obstacle to the mission culture formation and had to be removed.[36] Church leader 12 also noted that new leadership was monumental for their church: "Everybody, and everything's switched over. . . . I think it was just freshness."[37]

The size and scope of the church's ministry determined whether these key leaders in the church may have been in positions of leadership or just people who had a heart for their church to vibrate again for the *missio Dei*. Church leader 10 spoke of a deacon who was influential in partnering with him to see mission change: "He was my biggest supporter and talked it [mission culture] up and really helped make those changes."[38] Several of the larger churches added staff leadership in order to organize, equip, and deploy their people for mission. Other churches utilized key volunteer leaders whose role was to oversee a certain segment of the mission process or ministry. The smaller churches utilized more organic relationships between the church leader and key leaders as a way to infuse the mission culture into their congregation.

Church leaders reported that as members caught a vision and started to operate in the new mission culture, a new excitement and enthusiasm was felt throughout their church. Church leaders' investing in key leaders further shifted the mission culture in

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[35] Church leader 10, interview by author, Zoom video conference, February 12, 2020.

[36] Church leader 4, interview by author, recorded phone call utilizing Tapeacall, February 3, 2020.

[37] Church leader 12, interview by author, recorded phone call utilizing Tapeacall, February 19, 2020.

[38] Church leader 10, interview.

their church by magnetically drawing in other "like-minded" members to mission in the church. Church leader 6 stated, "God started bringing leaders that wanted to be a part of hearing about our church. . . . What we were doing in the schools and city . . . , it was very attractive to a lot of people."[39]

Church leaders employed training in order to equip key leaders to join in the *missio Dei* and to turn their church toward revitalization. Church leaders used denominational resources, books, missionaries, spiritual gift teaching, and core value formation as methods to cultivate mission culture in the heart of their leaders. The methodology that leaders used to train their leaders varied from church to church. Some leaders chose to do more formal training. Church leader 7 reported, "I created sessions with our core team on Sunday nights where we would do training times."[40] Church leader 11 set up "a series of classes that prepared people for" mission.[41] Other church leaders utilized mission conferences or trained members who were going on mission trips or serving at community events.

Theme 2: Leaders worked intentionally to change the mindset of the congregation. All but one of the church leaders reported that they worked intentionally to change some kind of "mindset" that was prevalent in the church. Several of the church leaders expressed that they led a shift of their church from a "survival mentality." The church had lost its role in the *missio Dei* and was focused on merely existing. Church leader 7 described his congregation as "doing everything they could to keep the lights on and exist."[42] Church leader 8 described his church's motivation and mindset as "seeing if

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[39] Church leader 6, interview by author, Zoom video conference, February 11, 2020.

[40] Church leader 7, interview by author, Zoom video conference, February 11, 2020.

[41] Church leader 11, interview by author, recorded phone call utilizing Tapeacall, February 12, 2020.

[42] Church leader 7, interview.

they could pay the light bill."[43] Church leader 1 described his church as "tired in some ways from some of the battles that had been fought and there was a moral failure that hurt the church. So I think all of those things had contributed to, [an attitude of] let's just tread water. Let's keep our head above water as long as we can."[44]

Other church leaders described their churches mindset as "inwardly focused." Church leader 5 stated that instead of pushing outward and partnering with the *missio Dei*, his congregation "turned in on themselves just trying to survive."[45] Church leader 1 described the mission culture at his church as "well intentioned, but non-existent. Most of what was happening was very inwardly focused."[46] Church leader 10 surmised, "You have to get a church thinking outward."[47]

Several church leaders described their church as suffering from a lack of direction and focus. Their churches, as church leader 1 lamented, "lack[ed] plan, purpose, and leadership."[48] Church leader 11 stated that his church suffered from a "country-church mentality."[49] His church expected people to just show up without any kind of intentional plan to push outward with the *missio Dei*.

Theme 3: Pastors utilized preaching to intentionally change mission culture. Unhealthy church culture is a theological problem.[50] So, it is unsurprising that

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[43] Church leader 8, interview by author, Zoom video conference, February 11, 2020.

[44] Church leader 1, interview by author, Zoom video conference, February 3, 2020.

[45] Church leader 5, interview.

[46] Church leader 1, interview.

[47] Church leader 10, interview.

[48] Church leader 1, interview.

[49] Church leader 11, interview.

[50] Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development* (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 102.

ten out of twelve of the church leaders interviewed stated that preaching was vital to healthy mission culture formation. Church leaders attempted to utilize preaching in order build a foundation for how a healthy church operated. Church leader 6 detailed that his church "spent the first year and a half defining from scripture what the New Testament Church is to be."[51] Church leader 9 stated that his church was transformed by preaching that was "faithful" and that constantly reminded the congregation of, and instilled in the congregation, a duty and desire to "share Jesus, talk to people about Jesus."[52] Church leader 1 attempted to use preaching "to take everything back to the Word."[53] Church leader 3 stated, "[We] began to take the word of God and just began to teach verse by verse."[54] Church leader 9 reflected that he utilized "lots of Bible . . . . Just understand what the Bible says and then . . . you should do it and apply the principles."[55]

Church leaders also noted the practicality of utilizing preaching for mission culture formation. Church leaders realized that preaching was the most efficient and effective time to communicate with the church. Church leader 11 described his attempt to employ preaching for revitalization as "preaching, teaching, pounding, banging my head against the wall. . . . Communicate, over communicating."[56] Church leader 7 surmised that "a huge portion of [revitalization] is going to be how good and effective is the preacher, and I almost think it's almost impossible to a certain extent to revitalize if the preacher's ineffective."[57]

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[51] Church leader 6, interview.

[52] Church leader 9, interview by author, Zoom video conference, February 11, 2020.

[53] Church leader 1, interview.

[54] Church leader 3, interview by author, recorded phone call utilizing Tapeacall, February 5, 2020.

[55] Church leader 4, interview.

[56] Church leader 11, interview.

[57] Church leader 7, interview.

Theme 4: Leaders initiated ministry in their community. Ten of the twelve church leaders indicated that getting their church members into the community to make relationships, meet needs, and initiate ministry was key to their church's revitalization. While not neglecting the mandate to take the gospel to the nations, church leaders realized that pushing members outward to their community broke the cycle of "inward focus," and God revitalized the church.

Interestingly enough, the diversity of ministry practices and initiatives carried out by church leaders seem to indicate that what kind of ministry is performed is less important than simply getting church members involved. Church leader 7 noted that these local ministries "encouraged our folks to get outside the walls [of the church]" and allowed church members to "just start getting to know people in the community."[58] The churches represented participated in ministry to teachers and schools, participated in events for the community, created resource centers for low-income community members, hosted service groups from other churches that served in the community, supported local first responders, supported local homes for at-risk youth, started a drug rehabilitation center, started a children's shelter, started a wellness center, and evangelized at local community events.

These ministries were utilized differently in the life of the churches represented. Several church leaders acknowledged their churches had an "event" type approach and mentality to mission, while other church leaders tried to focus more on the relational equity that could be built with people who lived in the surrounding community. Church leader 10 noted a shift from event-based missions to a "missional community disciple-making focus."[59] His church pushed missional ministry to the small groups of his

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[58] Church leader 7, interview.

[59] Church leader 10, interview. Relational equity refers to the trust built between a leader and his followers. Trust is built through relationship, good judgement over time, and consistency. See Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman. "The 3 Elements of Trust." *Harvard Business Review*, February 5, 2019.

church to help take the focus off of the actual event and place more emphasis on the relationships that could be cultivated for the gospel.

Theme 5: Leaders had an intentional communication strategy to highlight missions awareness. Nine of twelve respondents employed some sort of strategy to create missional awareness in their church. Some church leaders' strategy was more of an organic approach to raising awareness for mission. Church leader 7 used a "story-telling approach." He stated, "You keep beating that drum and you say, this [mission] is what it looks like."[60] He utilized his sermon as a time to share illustrations of mission and highlight what God was doing at his church through mission. Church leader 12 utilized a simple "bulletin board [where] every week there's at least three to four different signup sheets."[61] She would then create "a slide show of what we've done and then . . . we show it to the entire church and the entire church can see the effect that happened from what you did." Church leader 1 utilized similar tactics like "consistently showing pictures and videos and talk about all that God has been doing."[62]

Other churches utilized a more formal communication process. Church leader 6 and his church utilized a "visioneering" process whereby he led his church to craft a vision statement that defined their intentionality and focus on mission. This process led to a "DNA that carries through the whole heartbeat of the church."[63] Church leader 10's church utilized a mission conference every year to highlight opportunities and processes.

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https://hbr.org/2019/02/the-3-elements-of-trust. Church leaders must lead in such a way that members see their love and care for the church and it's people as it is now and for where the leader believes God desires the church to go.

[60] Church leader 7, interview.

[61] Church leader 12, interview.

[62] Church leader 1, interview.

[63] Church leader 6, interview.

Church leader 2's church created what they call an Acts 1:8 strategy. They created categories based on the geographic regions of Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth, with leaders and mission opportunities for each geographic location.[64] Church leader 2 also utilized a strategy of placing missional artifacts in conspicuous places of his church. They added "mission corners" in very visible areas of their church in order to promote strong mission culture.[65]

Theme 6: Leaders recognized a faithful few in their congregation whose hearts were warm to mission. Seven out of twelve church leaders recognized that there were members in their church who were ready to move on mission when presented with the opportunity. Church leader 6, when reflecting on the initial startup of the revitalization process at his church, stated, "While the heart was probably there to be missional, the living missionally wasn't." Church leader 11 stated, "I think everybody knew that they had been taught the Great Commission for years and they knew they were supposed to be doing it, but I think he [former pastor] was changing that mindset to get them motivated to do it."[66] Church leader 10 reported, "There was a lot of teaching on it, but there wasn't a lot of mobilizing people to do that."[67] Church leader 5 reported, "In their hearts . . . , they were good well-trained Southern Baptists. And they knew what their mission should be, and they really wanted to pass on the baton."[68]

Several of the church leaders realized these "faithful few" were the catalyst for the change that God was wanting to bring to their church. Church leader 1 reflected,

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[64] Church leader 2, interview by author, recorded phone call utilizing Tapeacall, February 5, 2020.

[65] Church leader 2, interview.

[66] Church leader 11, interview.

[67] Church leader 10, interview.

[68] Church leader 5, interview.

> I'd be quick to say that there were people here before I got here that were praying and they were faithful and maybe they weren't engaging others with the gospel like they should have, but there was still a hunger in their hearts to be useful for the kingdom. So in many ways I feel like what we're doing now is we're reaping the results of their faithfulness because they could have, they could have gone somewhere else.[69]

Church leader 6 stated that he still had people in his church that "wanted to be the church God wanted them to be."[70]

Theme 7: Leaders invested in short-term mission trips. Seven out of twelve interviewees reported that short-term trips were influential in the formation of mission culture that led to revitalization. These trips included both domestic and international trips. These trips varied in purpose and goals. Trips ranged from construction trips, trips to aid church plants, trips to teach English, and trips to evangelize. Church leaders noted short-term trips were a way to catalyze people to mission. Church leader 3 reported that "we had a couple in our church just this past summer they went to Honduras and they came back totally changed. . . . Now they are active, and they have a heart now realizing that there is mission other places."[71] While church leaders could not verbalize with specificity the ways that trips aided in revitalization, it is clear that they observed a connection. Church leader 2 commented, "This year we have 12 mission trips. . . . Missions has been a part of . . . revitalization."

Theme 8: Leaders led their church to increase the financing of mission. Seven out of twelve church leaders reported that they saw their church's increasing financial support of mission as a path toward revitalization. Often, this step of increasing

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[69] Church leader 1, interview.

[70] Church leader 6, interview.

[71] Church leader 3, interview.

mission giving was one of the initial steps the church made toward mission. Church leader 1 reported,

> We just appropriated some, some resources to say we are going to begin at least giving right to, to advance the kingdom. And then we just talked about that, you know, every week we're talking about when you give, you're not just giving to what's happening here, you're giving to the gospel getting to the nations. And we were able, at that point, to talks specifically about where those resources were going and who they were going to and what was happening in those churches.[72]

Church leader 4 reported that an initial sacrificial gift made in faith by his church was influential in shifting the culture of the church: "Remember this church was struggling and every aspect even financially they were struggling. So I told them we were going to pull 100,000 out of reserves and buy the property and build a building. It ended up being about $160,000 but they went with it."[73] That first financial gift has led to a blossoming church partnership with a network of churches in Central America.

Theme 9: Leaders created ministry partnerships with other churches. Half of the respondents reported that partnerships created with other churches cultivated mission culture that led to revitalization. These partnerships were diverse in geography and types of churches. Four out of the six respondents reported that their partner churches were located in the United States, while two of the respondents' churches had partnerships with international churches. The partnerships mostly consisted of financial support and the sending of members on short-term trips to assist the partner church in some ministry venture. One interviewee's partnership consisted of other churches sending short-term teams to the respondent's church to assist in community ministry. Five of the six respondents' partnerships existed with new church plants in a diverse number of geographic locations.

Church leaders explained that these church partnerships expanded their

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[72] Church leader 1, interview.

[73] Church leader 4, interview.

members' view through exposure of a different geographic and spiritual landscape that, in turn, "shifted" their heart toward their community. Church leader 3 discovered that his own congregants were "so caught up in our own area and so we just became adapted to it."[74] Ministry in a different geographic location enlightened congregants of mission opportunities that existed all around them in their local community. Church leader 11 reflected that the partnerships his church cultivated were "the catalyst that held us become who we are today."[75]

Theme 10: Leaders utilized modeling and small group discipleship to warm hearts for mission. Five out of twelve respondents reported that some sort of intentional fostering of relationships through modeling or small groups turned their congregation's heart toward the *missio Dei*. Most of these relationships happened organically through intentional time spent with congregants. Church leader 1 reported,

> I led what I call a discipleship group . . . . My wife did as well. . . . We began to invest in them through reading the word together, praying together. We met weekly to talk about what we were learning from the scriptures and then just talked about application and accountability. . . . And we found that a lot of the people who gravitated to change had participated in or benefited from being in a discipleship group.[76]

He went on to say, "I think it was really just because the spiritual temperature in their in their heart had increased . . . , and so we really have seen discipleship groups serve a wonderful role in helping us turn the tide and sort of deepen the affections of people for the Lord and for his work through the local church."[77]

Church leader 12 reflected, "Getting people into in-depth Bible studies so that

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[74] Church leader 3, interview.

[75] Church leader 11, interview.

[76] Church leader 1, interview.

[77] Church leader 1, interview.

they can start growing spiritually and then offering the opportunities [for mission]" was a factor in the cultivation of mission culture.[78] She went on to explain her church's revitalization in terms of the *missio Dei*: "The more Christ-like [members become,] the more sanctification happens. The more Christ-like you get, the more you're going to desire what God desires. And He tells us He desires for us to get out and to be His hands and feet."[79]

Church leader 11 noted that "we've slowly begun to transition from events to actually the only one on one relationships with people."[80] Church leader 10 realized that this shift in mentality from events to relational equity was influential in his churches growth, specifically in the launch of their second church campus site.[81] Church leader 3 noted that as his people began to get to know people in the community, there was immediate numeric growth in his church.[82]

Theme 11: Leaders communicated a raised level of member expectation. Five out of twelve church leaders reported that intentionally raising the level of ministry expectations for new and existing members was integral to building mission culture that led to revitalization. To push members' attention off of themselves and onto the mission of God, these church leaders used membership classes and membership expectations as another avenue to cast vision for a church that was joining the *missio Dei*.

Several church leaders utilized "new member classes" not only to cast vision for mission but also to plug new members into community-focused ministry. Church

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[78] Church leader 12, interview.

[79] Church leader 12, interview.

[80] Church leader 11, interview.

[81] Church leader 10, interview.

[82] Church leader 3, interview.

leader 9 reported that not only is his church intentional to explain the place of importance that mission holds in his church but also his church uses membership classes as an opportunity to recruit new members into real mission opportunities in the surrounding community.[83] Church leader 2's church created a culture of where new people are encouraged to "test drive ministries."[84] Church leader 11 noted that these "missional" expectations have been magnetic to new people who desire to join a church that is making an impact in their local community. The inwardly focused culture of "just sitting on a pew on Sunday morning, listening to the music, getting the message, shaking my hand as they go out the door" was no longer acceptable.[85]

Theme 12: Church leaders led focused prayer for mission. Five out of twelve respondents identified that focused prayer for mission was integral in cultivating a culture of mission that led to revitalization. Several of the church leaders saw prayer as the initial step that their church took in changing the culture and hearts of their church. Church leader 10 encouraged other potential revitalizing leaders to "get serious about prayer . . . . The book of Acts is a dissertation on, in my opinion, persistent prayer leads to powerful evangelism and life change. So I think it's [revitalization is] born in prayer."[86]

Prayer was utilized by church leaders to focus and unite their congregants around mission, but many of the church leaders personally spent prolonged times in prayer for their congregation to shift toward the *missio Dei*. Church leader 2 encouraged

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[83] Church leader 9, interview.

[84] Church leader 2, interview.

[85] Church leader 11, interview.

[86] Church leader 10, interview.

other revitalization leaders to have "a season of prayer and fasting."[87] Prayer was also seen as a weapon against discouragement and resistance to missional change. Church leader 3 noted that as he spent time on "his face" before the Lord, he began to see God work. He also utilized that he had several key leaders and other pastors in his area to join him in praying for missional change.[88]

Theme 13: Leaders focused on moving toward more optimal church governance. Five out of twelve respondents indicated that a change in church governance was influential in shifting the culture of mission that led to revitalization. Several of the church leaders reported that their church was bogged down by unnecessary systems and committees of leadership that complicated and barricaded the desired change process. Church leader 10 surmised that his church made every decision "in a business meeting. They were used to voting on everything."[89] Church governance was a major factor in the revitalization of church leader 10's church: "I don't believe we were revitalized till . . . we changed our governance."[90]

Church leader 8 also saw his church's bylaws as an impediment to revitalization. He saw a distorted desire for control in that his congregants "were more interested in who's on what committee."[91] Church leader 2 took the opportunity to rewrite his church's constitution and bylaws very soon after becoming the lead pastor. He reflected on the change, saying, "I took out 29 committees. That changed the culture right there."[92]

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[87] Church leader 2, interview.

[88] Church leader 3, interview.

[89] Church leader 10, interview.

[90] Church leader 10, interview.

[91] Church leader 8, interview.

[92] Church leader 2, interview.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this three-phase explanatory sequential mixed methods study was to investigate select churches to determine the influence the cultivation of a mission culture had in church revitalization within the SBC. In phase 1 of the research, the SBC Annual Church Profile (ACP) data was examined, resulting in the identification of 716 churches that met the criteria of revitalization from 2006 to 2016.

Phase 2 of the quantitative strand invited the 716 revitalized churches to participate in a 32-item survey to investigate and discover the factors and influences of revitalization. These invitations resulted in 145 churches that responded to complete the survey, resulting in a confidence interval of 6.71. From these 145 respondents, 12 churches were purposefully selected and invited to participate in an in-depth qualitative interview related to the subject of transforming mission culture in church revitalization. This third phase of the study consisted of qualitative interviews with 12 church leaders who rated mission as a significant factor in their church's revitalization.

Phase 3 interviews consisted of telephone or video-conferencing interviews. During the interviews, participants were asked several questions related to mission culture, organizational change, and mission practices to identify practices and principles related to the revitalization process. Participants were also asked to share obstacles to leadership and solutions that were helpful. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded for analysis.

These phase 3 interviews provided clarity on the importance of cultivating mission culture for church revitalization from the perspectives of leaders in revitalization contexts. Specifically, the interviews revealed thirteen themes related to the relationship between mission culture and church revitalization. First, leaders involved other key leaders in the mission culture formation process. Second, leaders worked intentionally to change the mindset of the congregation. Third, pastors utilized preaching to intentionally change mission culture. Fourth, leaders initiated ministry in their community. Fifth,

leaders had an intentional communication strategy to highlight missions awareness. Sixth, leaders recognized a faithful few in their congregation whose hearts were warm to mission. Seventh, leaders invested in short-term mission trips. Eighth, leaders led their church to increase the financing of mission. Ninth, leaders created ministry partnerships with other churches. Tenth, leaders utilized modeling and small-group discipleship to warm hearts for mission. Eleventh, leaders communicated a raised level of member expectation. Twelfth, church leaders led focused prayer for mission. Finally, leaders focused on moving toward more optimal church governance.

Research Questions

This study began with the desire to answer six specific research questions. After collecting and analyzing the data, a brief description of each question and its answer is provided below.

Research Question 1

RQ 1: What percentage of SBC churches are plateaued or declining?

As stated in the research protocol earlier, during the year 2016, of the 47,272 total churches in the SBC, 28,046 SBC churches existed having sufficient data to calculate their five-year worship-attendance trend. Among this reporting group, 7,211 (25.71 percent) were plateaued, and 13,656 (48.69 percent) were declining, for total of 20,867 (74.40 percent) SBC churches that were plateaued or declining (see table 3 above).[93]

Research Question 2

RQ 2: Of those churches that have experienced decline, what percentage have experienced revitalization?

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[93] This percentage was calculated on the number of churches that had sufficient data (28,046).

As stated earlier, 716 churches met the criteria for church revitalization as defined by this research design. These sample churches adhered to the following criteria: (1) worship attendance in 2011 had declined 10 percent or more compared to 2006 (5 years prior), and (2) worship attendance in 2016 had grown 10 percent or more over the 2011 levels (5 years prior). The field was then narrowed by eliminating congregations that (1) did not have 10 percent annual growth for 2 of the last 5 years or (2) did not have a minimum worship-attendance-to-baptism ratio in those same years. Our decisions resulted in the identification of 716 churches that were experiencing revitalization, which was 5.24 percent of the original churches that were previously in decline.[94]

Research Question 3

RQ 3: Of those SBC churches experiencing revitalization, what percentage emphasized a culture of mission in the process of revitalization?

Based on the design criteria to define "mission culture," 69.12 percent of revitalizing churches emphasized mission in the process of revitalization (see table 11 above).[95]

Research Question 4

RQ 4: In what ways does transforming the mission culture contribute to church revitalization?

After analyzing data from the qualitative interviews, the following themes arose to inform research question 4:

1. Instills confidence in the leader to lead with biblical authority and conviction

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[94] Of the 28,046 churches with reported ACP data, the "growing" churches (25.50 percent) were removed from this calculation and no longer part of the population in need of revitalization. The above 5.24 percent was calculated by dividing 716 churches by the 13,656 (48.69 percent) churches which were in decline in 2016.

[95] This percentage was calculated by adding the "Important" (36.03) and "Highly Important" (33.09) totals for a rating of 69.12. See table 11 on page 92.

2. Expands the leadership base of the church
3. Provides a vehicle to transfer vision
4. Delivers the opportunity for the church to unify around a goal
5. Shifts the congregation's focus from their preferences to the needs of the community
6. Allows the leader to accomplish tangible success that can be harnessed for further risk
7. Overcomes the challenge of the traditional inward-focused mindset
8. Focuses congregants' attention toward spiritual growth
9. Increases member engagement

Research Question 5

RQ 5: What changes to the church's organizational culture facilitated effective mission culture?

After analyzing data from the qualitative interviews, the following themes arose to inform research question 5:

1. Paradigmatic organization changes (e.g., roles, functions, offices, constitutions)
2. Altering worship service style to match the dynamics of the surrounding community
3. New leaders in new positions
4. Expanded and new ministries
5. Intentional efforts to focus on and celebrate desired culture
6. Refocusing of resources to critical mission initiatives

Research Question 6

RQ 6: What mission principles, priorities, and best practices can be identified for use in other revitalization contexts?

After analyzing data from the qualitative interviews, the following themes arose to inform research question 6:

1. A significant change in leadership preceded revitalization.
2. Churches engaged in ministry partnerships with other churches.

3. The lead pastor sets the tone for mission culture development.
4. Missions opportunities and celebrations must constantly be presented to the church.
5. Mission culture development is formed in discipleship relationships and pathways.
6. Short-term trips to different geographical regions help warm hearts for mission.
7. Mission culture is sometimes best cultivated through ministry in the local community.
8. Successful church leaders involve mission culture formation in the church's assimilation processes.

Evaluation of Research Design

This study utilized an explanatory sequential mixed methods research design with multiple researchers. The first phase was a data collection to analyze quantitative data in order to select and target a specific quantitative population for the second phase. The third phase used qualitative interviews and in-depth analyses to explain the data from the quantitative phases.[96] The design of this study was sufficient for the stated research purposes.

Strengths

The design and makeup of the research proved to be a strength in several ways. The research team shared data, resources, critiques, and encouragement throughout the process. The team was able to leverage its collective strength in order to distribute surveys and collect data. The team was able to cover a broad spectrum of revitalization topics while keeping the data concise enough to not overwhelm the subjects.

The population of SBC churches proved to be an additional strength of the study. The size and scope of the SBC provided for a continuity of the population (e.g., similar ecclesiastical governance, nomenclature) while providing a diversity of geographic and church-size dynamics.

An additional strength of the study was that church leaders who had been

[96] Creswell and Plano Clark, *Mixed Methods Research*, 70-71.

involved in church revitalization provided the data. The quantitative instrument used in phase 2 was designed to elicit data about church revitalization and identify potential participants for phase 3. Keeping the identification of church leaders and their churches anonymous allowed more freedom for the respondents to speak openly about challenges they faced during the revitalization process.

Challenges

The most challenging aspect of the study was the phase 2 survey distribution and collection. While 716 surveys were distributed, a relatively small number (145) were completed, which significantly impacted the reliability of the data interpretation. Several circumstances contributed to a lower-than-desired response rate. Despite repetitive and varied attempts by the research team, a sufficient number of pastors and church leaders did not respond to the survey to reach the desired confidence interval of 5%.

A second challenge was observed in the phase 2 survey instrument. In the survey, church leaders were asked to identify their role in the revitalization. During the phase 3 interview portion, some church leaders struggled to identify when their own revitalization started or ended. Some of the church leaders assumed they were still in revitalization or attributed the revitalization to a previous leader. Future research may benefit from improved clarity for participants on the criteria that they meet as a part of the research population.[97]

A third challenge involved survey items 19 and 20. In those questions, the survey only identified the missional practices of "financially supporting short-term and/or long-term missionaries" and "sending short-term and/or long- term missionaries from its own membership." The survey could have benefitted from a wider range of missional

[97] Further statistical study such as MANOVA, regression analysis, Chi-square, etc. could lead to further insight into when revitalization takes place during a leader's tenure. This data could prove invaluable to encourage leaders to invest the time necessary to see the changes God desires in their church.

practices.

A fourth challenge that presented was that many of the churches that met the criteria for revitalization were small rural churches without email capability and access to the internet. This reality limited the collection of surveys in order to achieve a better confidence level.[98]

Conclusion

This study collected quantitative data from 716 revitalized churches from SBC churches in North America. In phase 2 of the study, 145 churches completed a survey instrument regarding their experiences in revitalization and mission. Finally, in phase 3 of the study, 12 church leaders were interviewed, and they provided data that shaped principles and best practices for churches and church leaders seeking to revitalize within their local church context. In addition, the study revealed how church leaders transformed the mission culture of their church to facilitate revitalization.

These findings represent one of the largest studies on church revitalization in the past decade. While the study generalized to those SBC churches experiencing revitalization, the principles and practices derived from the study provide knowledge and experiences that may be transferable to churches of similar size in various confessional contexts throughout the United States. The following chapter discusses additional insights, implications, and recommendations for further research.

[98] The research team communicated to all 716 churches that a hard copy could be sent to them through the mail.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

The overall purpose of the larger sequential explanatory mixed methods study was to identify revitalizing churches and learn what methods they utilized to successfully move them toward revitalization. The focus of this particular study was to investigate and discover the role of mission culture formation in church revitalization within the context of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). Phase 1 examined Lifeway data from 2010 to 2016 to determine the reality of churches that needed revitalization. This data revealed 716 churches that met the researchers' criteria for revitalization. In phase 2, 145 church leaders participated in a survey specifically designed to capture the experiences of leaders who saw God revitalize their church as well as to examine the significant factors of revitalization. Phase 3 identified twelve churches that identified that mission culture development contributed to their revitalization. The leaders of those churches were interviewed to identify the common themes and best principles and practices of revitalization. In order to aid future revitalizations, this chapter provides insights and descriptions that connect the research findings with the existing literature. This chapter also provides details on research implications and applications, articulates the limitations of the research, and offers recommendations for further research.

Research Implications

This study embarked with the declaration that the church in North America is in serious crises. Research reports from several organizations and authors—such as Lifeway Research, Pew Research, Barna Group, Thom Rainer, Albert Mohler, Ed Stetzer, Mike Dodson, and Bill Henard—show the church at a "tipping point" of

inefficacy.[1] While there is debate on the severity of the crisis, the majority of churches in North America are in decline or plateaued. "Multiplying" churches that are growing by conversion and embody the essence *missio Dei* ministry are numerically statistically insignificant.[2] The state SBC churches is equally discouraging. While the denomination is growing in regions outside the "Bible belt," total baptisms in 2019 fell by 4 percent of the previous year to the lowest number since World War II.[3] While church planting has proven an effective method to engage the increasingly diverse and irreligious North American culture, Kevin Ezell surmises that the SBC cannot find enough qualified church planters or launch enough successful plants to reach North America.[4] The current landscape of church health and vibrancy has created an urgent need for research into church revitalization to give existing churches hope and tools to return to health and effectiveness.

The findings of this research confirm the "narrative of church decline" found in the revitalization literature. The quantitative data gathered in phase 1 found that the SBC in 2016 had sufficient data on 28,046 churches to measure research question 1

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[1] Admittingly there are a few researchers who do not accept the "doom and gloom" forecast of the future of the North American church. See Ted A. Campbell, *The Sky Is Falling, The Church Is Dying: and Other False Alarms* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015); Mark Sayers, *The Reappearing Church: The Hope for Renewal in the Rise of Our Post-Christian Culture* (Chicago: Moody, 2019). Sayers does not deny the harbingers of church decline the revitalization that authors expound on, but he affirms the current cultural phenomena that God is about to move again in culture as he has done in similar historical moments in the past.

[2] See Lifeway Research, "Becoming Five Multiplication Study 2019," accessed May 1, 2019, http://lifewayresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/2019ExponentialReport.pdf; Mark Wingfield, "Diagnosis: 52 Percent of SBC Churches Stunted; 18 Percent on List of Critically Ill," *Baptist Standard*, December 12, 1990.

[3] Kate Shellnutt, "Southern Baptists See Biggest Drop in 100 Years," *Christianity Today*, July 10, 2020, https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2020/june/southern-baptist-sbc-member-drop-annual-church-profile-2019.html. Shellnutt also notes that while attendance held steady in 2019, the numbers of members reported dropped by 288,000. However, membership has been increasingly viewed as an unhelpful metric of church health.

[4] Kevin Ezell, "Breathing New Life into Dying Churches," in *A Guide to Church Revitalization*, ed. R. Albert Mohler Jr (Louisville, KY: SBTS Press, 2015), 14; Mike Elbert, "Trustees: NAMB Celebrates Offering, Meets Missionaries," *Baptist Press*, July 10, 2020, http://www.bpnews.net/53732/trustees-namb-celebrates-offering-meets-missionaries.

("What percentage of SBC churches are plateaued or declining"). This study found 20,867 (73.99 percent) churches that were in plateau or decline. Only a mere 716 (5.24 percent of the churches that were in decline) had reached a level of revitalization. These percentages harmonize with other quantitative revitalization studies completed in the past fifteen years.[5]

While one component of this study focused on revitalization in general, the primary focus of the study was on the role of mission culture development in revitalization. Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson point out that a church becomes more institutionalized as it ages. Church life seems to revolve more around programs and forms of ministry, and soon, activity chokes out *missio Dei* productivity.[6] Inwardly focused churches begin having their hearts warmed more by the process of decision making in the church and relishing their own personal preferences rather than participating in outward-focused *missio Dei* ministry.[7] However, missional focus in leadership leads to church health and growth.[8] Revitalization leaders connected their church back with the *missio Dei* by shifting the attitudes of the congregation outward and by creating a culture that equipped and empowered members for ministry in the community.[9]

Within the quantitative portion of this study, church leaders indicated that

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[5] Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson conclude that around 70-80 percent of North American churches are stagnant or in decline. See Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville: B&H, 2007), 19. Albert Mohler states that around 80 to 90 percent of churches in America are not growing. R. Albert Mohler Jr., "Christ Will Build and Rebuild His Church: The Need for 'Generational Replant,'" in Mohler, *A Guide to Church Revitalization*, 8. Thom Rainer has more encouraging numbers from more recent research on SBC churches. He states that 56 percent of churches are declining, 9 percent of churches are plateaued, and 35 percent of churches are growing. Thom Rainer, "Dispelling the 80 Percent Myth of Declining Churches," June 28, 2019, http://thomrainer.com/2017/06/dispelling-80-percent-myth-declining-churches/.

[6] Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 19-20.

[7] Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 22-23. Clifton laments that the church anesthetizes the pain of church death with an overabundance of activity and by maintaining a suboptimal governance structure (26).

[8] Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 59.

[9] Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 132, 140-41.

efforts in cultivating and shifting the mission culture in their church was one of the central catalysts to their church's revitalization.[10] The qualitative portion of this study observed that transforming the church's mission culture contributed to revitalization by (1) instilling confidence in the leader to lead with biblical authority and conviction, (2) expanding the leadership base of church, (3) providing a vehicle in which to transfer vision, (4) delivering the opportunity for the church to unify around a goal, (5) shifting the congregation's focus from their preferences to the needs of the community, (6) allowing the leader to accomplish tangible success that can be harnessed for further risk, (7) overcoming the challenge of the traditional inward-focused mindset, (8) focusing congregants' attention toward spiritual growth, and (9) increasing member engagement.[11] Church leaders seeking revitalization would do well to cultivate a culture that joins our God on his mission to reconcile the world to himself for his glory. The following section turns attention to possible research applications that were observed in the qualitative strand of this research.

Research Applications

Phase 3 of this study examined churches that specifically rated mission culture development as significant in the revitalization. Qualitative interviews were performed with church leaders from twelve churches (see appendix 2 for interview items). The church leaders represented a range of church sizes, tenure in leadership, and geographical location. Specific themes observed from these interviews were discussed in the previous chapter. The following sections examine three specific research applications that surfaced from the interview themes in light of the existing literature.

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[10] Nearly 7 out of 10 (69.12 percent) survey respondents ranked mission as the revitalization factor with the greatest importance to their church's revitalization. I came to this conclusion by combing the scores of "Highly Important" and "Important" for question 8 of the survey (see table 11).

[11] These observations were distilled from the qualitative church leader interviews. They are the answer to research question 3.

The Role of the Leader in Mission Culture Formation

Church revitalization rises and falls with leadership.[12] Empirical studies researching key factors of revitalization consistently find pastoral leadership as one of the most consistent predicators of a church's ability to revitalize.[13] Without gospel-focused leadership into the *missio Dei*, the inwardly focused church will slowly trudge toward impending church death and a loss of gospel ministry in the community. Revitalization is usually birthed in the heart of one or a few leaders who have a God-given vision for the restoration of the local church.[14] Revitalization is not for the faint of heart, and it is generally led by strong leaders.[15]

The literature promotes the idea that revitalization takes a certain "type" of leader or a leader with certain gifts and skill sets.[16] Church leader 7 reported that after persisting in local church revitalization for years, he could identify whether a leader "had what it took" to help the church "come around."[17] Revitalization leaders realize the complexity of church decline and are invested in a holistic approach to return the church to vibrancy by partnership in the *missio Dei*.[18] For the churches studied in phase 3 of this study, revitalization began to initiate with the arrival of a new leader. Eleven out of

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[12] Daniel C. Eymann, "Turnaround Church Ministry: Causes of Decline and Changes Needed for Turnaround," *Great Commission Research Journal* 3, no. 2 (2012): 154. I desire to avoid promoting a "man-centered" view of revitalization. Ultimately revitalization depends on the work of God.

[13] Joseph Stephen Hudson, "A Competency Model for Church Revitalization in Southern Baptist Churches: Mixed Methods Study" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 3.

[14] Jeff Christopherson, *Kingdom Matrix* (Boise, ID: Russell Media, 2012), 126-27.

[15] Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 42.

[16] Hudson posits, "Revitalization may require greater and fundamentally different types of leadership than a typical pastorate, church plant, or church replant." Hudson, "A Competency Model," 135. See also Aubrey Malphurs, *Look Before You Lead: How to Discern & Shape Your Church Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 129-46. Malphurs provides a survey of existing work compiled on the "makeup" of a "turn-around" pastor.

[17] Church leader 7, interview by author, Zoom video conference, February 11, 2020.

[18] Charles R. Taber, "Missiology and the Bible," *Missiology* 11, no. 2 (1983): 232.

twelve church leaders interviewed acknowledged that revitalization began to occur with the senior/leader pastor's arrival to the church.

Leaders led with the authority of the *missio Dei* found in Scripture.

Revitalization leaders recognize that God has been, and will always be, on his mission to redeem and restore his fallen creation to his original design. Phase 3 church leaders held to the truth that the Bible is a book about mission in order to drive them to utilize the Scriptures as their source of authority to push for change.[19] While church leaders utilized the benefits and wisdom of practical changes in the church, the true heart change and motivation necessary to push congregants outward can only be supplied by God's Word.[20] The Bible is the ultimate guide for leaders to excise unhealthy church culture.[21] Scripture must set the agenda.[22] Church leaders utilized scriptural authority through vehicles such as preaching, membership expectations, and creative mission strategy to shift the church culture outward.

Phase 3 qualitative interviews confirmed the revitalization literature in that preaching is a vital tool for church leaders to utilize Scripture to push their congregations outward with the *missio Dei*. Church leader 6 reflected that "we spent the first year and a half defining from scripture what the New Testament church is to be again, reminding ourselves what we are committed to."[23]

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[19] Keith Whitfield, "The Triune God: The God of Mission," in *Theology and Practice of Mission: God, the Church, and the Nations*, ed. Bruce Ashford (Nashville: B&H, 2011), 19.

[20] Graham Hill, *Salt, Light, and a City: Introducing Missional Ecclesiology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 265. Clifton warns revitalization leaders that if the leader only motivates with pragmatic benefits to ministry change, members will "bail" when the pain of change becomes too high. Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 19.

[21] Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Developmen*t (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 131. Geiger and Peck graciously remind church leaders that they inherently have no power. All potential change power is supplied by Scripture.

[22] Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 93.

[23] Church leader 6, interview by author, Zoom video conference, February 11, 2020.

Change motivation based in Scripture presented church leaders with the opportunity to step outside of the same "preference-based" leadership typical of the church. Church leader 1 noted,

> We just took everything back to the word. . . . I tried not to say that this is what I want to do, or this is my opinion. I was trying to take it back to [what] Jesus said. . . . We tried to come back to God's word and make that our benchmark. . . . And that seemed to help create buy in among people [and] less argument. Less argument in that as opposed to if I would have said, "Hey, let me tell you what I want to do."[24]

When thinking about change motivation. church leader 8 commented, "We tried to make it less about change. . . . I preach the Bible . . . from front cover to back cover . . . . It [the Bible] is a story of God, but it's about mission and what Christ came to do."[25] Church leader 5 posited that using Scripture as the basis for mission culture change allowed him to lead his church toward *missio Dei* ministry "with an urgency that we had to do this."[26]

Inwardly focused churches exist to satiate the needs, desires, and preferences of their current members. Stetzer and Dodson found that "comeback churches" utilized increased expectation of church membership as a tool of discipleship and to increase outward-focused *missio Dei* ministry.[27] Instead of hoping and wishing that members would capture Scripture's missional blueprint for church members, revitalization leaders communicated openly about God's design for human participation in the *missio Dei*.

Several phase 3 interviews utilized "new membership classes" in order to clearly communicate expectations.[28] These "classes" assisted church leaders in

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[24] Church leader 1, interview by author, Zoom video conference, February 3, 2020.

[25] Church leader 7, interview.

[26] Church leader 5, interview by author, Zoom video conference, February 7, 2020.

[27] Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 124.

[28] These "gatherings" were carried out in different formats that fit the context of the church. Some churches had one-time gatherings over lunch where church vision, beliefs, and leadership introductions were shared, while other churches had a more extensive process of meetings over an extended period of time.

connecting guests into the life of the church, helping new attendees find a place of ministry, and acting as a filter and magnet for the member profile that the church was intentionally trying to produce. Church leader 2 reported that new attendees are "encouraged to test drive ministries" in their "connection lunch" designed for guests and new attendees.[29] This opportunity allows those new to the church to connect to, and participate in, the *missio Dei* from the beginning of their interaction with the church.

Several of the phase 3 respondents noted that increased membership expectations provided a filter for the "type" of member that began to join their church. Church leader 11 admitted, "The ones [members] we have gained, they have been mission minded. . . . I hate to use the world 'quality' members, but you know they are not just sitting on the pew on Sunday morning, listening to music, getting the message, shaking my hand . . . , and then they leave and [do] not get to work."[30] Church leader 5 noted that *missio Dei* membership expectations were attractive to the new group of congregants that have joined the church since the initiation of the revitalization.[31]

A number of the phase 3 church leaders created a *missio Dei* strategy for ministry in their church that was informed by Scripture. Mission is the necessary consequence of believers' union with Christ, and the local church continues Christ's "sentness" as his mystical body in the world.[32] Several of the church leaders interviewed modeled their mission strategy from the early pages of the book of Acts. Church leader 6 developed an "Acts 1:8 mission model." His church focused ministry on what they

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[29] Church leader 2, interview by author, recorded phone call utilizing Tapeacall, February 5, 2020.

[30] Church leader 11, interview by author, recorded phone call utilizing Tapeacall, February 12, 2020.

[31] Church leader 5, interview.

[32] Ross Hastings, *Missional God, Missional Church: Hope for Re-Evangelizing the West* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2012), 245.

believed were their Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and ends of the earth.[33] Church leader 2's church recruited missional leaders for each of the Acts 1:8 designations who plan ministry and recruit leaders to do *missio Dei*-focused ministry.

Leaders built a coalition of other mission culture architects. No church leader can solely bring revitalization.[34] Successful revitalization is carried out as other leaders in the church adopt the *missio Dei* as their own and begin to advocate for mission culture change in the church and live it out in their everyday lives.[35] It is key for revitalizers to identify and recruit as many active, vocal allies as possible before introducing change in the church.[36] Some phase 3 church leaders were aided by church leaders who were already in places of formal leadership, while some of the larger churches leaders reported that they added staff members to continue the *missio Dei* momentum in their church. Church leader 10 reflected that a chairman of the deacons was "a key influencer early on" and "one of my biggest supporters."[37]

Other church leaders intentionally invested in congregants who were not yet part of the existing leadership structure of the church. Church leader 1 utilized a discipleship group where he "read the word together" and "prayed together."[38] The "spiritual temperature in their heart increased" and "deepen[ed] the affections of people for the Lord and his work through the local church." While the methodologies differed from formal training programs to informal mentoring and small groups, every phase 3

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[33] Church leader 6, interview.

[34] Andrew M. Davis, *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 175.

[35] Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 50.

[36] Malphurs, *Look Before You Lead*, 118.

[37] Church leader 10, interview by author, Zoom video conference, February 12, 2020.

[38] Church leader 1, interview.

church leader worked at building coalitions of other key leaders to help cultivate mission culture.

Leaders moved toward optimal forms of governance. Graham Hill exclaims that a church participating in the *missio Dei* will embrace missional ecclesiology throughout every "crack and crevice" of the church's structures, practices, systems, offices, and ministries.[39] However, governance can lead a church to become inwardly focused and can block leaders' initiative to push the church to *missio Dei* ministry. Dying churches find the motivation for their existence in their church structure.[40] The inwardly focused church structures itself for self-preservation; the goal is survival.

One symptom of dysfunctional governance is an inclination to protect the preferences of the majority of congregants. Church members can be hesitant to change programs, methodologies, and cultural elements that hinder *missio Dei* ministry. They utilize a more "democratic" form of polity to enforce their will. Church leader 10 reported that "the church was used to doing everything in a business meeting. They were used to voting on everything."[41] In his view, this leadership system led to "open divisiveness." He reflected that negativity aired publicly carried the potential to divide and halt forward momentum. His church began to grow rapidly once they repurposed their constitution and bylaws to allow for more pastoral leadership in the methodological decisions.

Several church leaders also noted a direct correlation between redefining the biblical role of a "deacon" and revitalization. A clear delineation of the biblical role of "pastor or elder" and "deacon" led to a more synergistic, Spirit-led relationships among

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[39] Hill, *Salt, Light, and a City*, 165.

[40] Bill Henard, *Reclaimed Church: How Churches Grow Decline and Experience Revitalization* (Nashville: B&H, 2018), chap. 8, Kindle.

[41] Church leader 10, interview.

church leaders. Church leader 4 noted that his church's moving from being "committee and deacon led" to a more pastor-led model was integral in his church's revitalization.[42]

Dysfunctional governance can also cause congregants to lose focus of *missio Dei* ministry. Several church leaders noted that their church had over twenty committees where most congregants spent more time *talking about* ministry rather than *living out* ministry. Mission can never be relegated to a program or a project. Churches that focus on programs that lead to "activity" and "busyness" can end up choking out gospel productivity.[43] Streamlined governance allowed more congregants to join in participation with outward-focused *missio Dei* ministry. When the focus of the congregation moves from their preferences, facilities, and personal spiritual maturity to the needs of the community, the church is freed to make an impact in the community.[44]

Leaders intentionally brought continual attention to mission culture. Church culture must be shaped and changed with great intentionality.[45] The interviewed church leaders used a variety of methodologies to consistently cast vision to push their church to be aligned with the *missio Dei*. While methodologies differed, church leaders labored to "beat the drum" of mission culture in order to give a tangible expression of what mission culture lived out looked like in their specific church and neighborhood.

The respondent church leaders developed intentional language that was deployed in the activities and ministries of the church. Common, clear missional language gave church leaders the opportunity to actualize the transformation of mission culture that led to revitalization. Without a clear articulation of vision, the revitalization

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[42] Church leader 4, interview by author, recorded phone call utilizing Tapeacall, February 3, 2020.

[43] Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 19-20.

[44] Henard, *Reclaimed Church*, chap. 8.

[45] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 149.

effort becomes no more than a list of confusing and incompatible projects that take the church in no specific direction.[46] Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck acknowledge that "unity of movement is partially preserved and propagated by shared vocabulary and sets of ideas."[47] Church leader 6 led his church in a visioning process where the church created a vision statement that clearly articulated their partnership in outward-focused *missio Dei* ministry. He reported that clear language led to specific direction for his church's ministry.[48] Church leader 1 surmised, "We're trying to remind them, you are not a consumer, you're a contributor."[49]

As stated earlier, church leaders utilized preaching as a vehicle to turn hearts outward. However, church leaders strategically utilized stories and testimonies of outward-focused ministry to warm the hearts of their people. Church leader 7 noted that his employment of missional illustrations and stories in sermons contributed to a contagious missional culture in his church.[50]

Leaders also utilized artifacts such as videos, photos, and "mission corners" to help keep mission culture front and center. Church leader 2 stated that his church created intentional spaces in the church that had pictures from previous mission trips and volunteers to help answer questions and engage congregants for mission.[51] Church leader 3 posted a sign outside the door of the entrance of his church to remind church members

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[46] John P. Kotter, "Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail," in *HBR's 10 Must Reads on Change Management* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2011), 8.

[47] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 115.

[48] Church leader 6, interview.

[49] Church leader 1, interview.

[50] Church leader 7, interview.

[51] Church leader 2, interview.

that the mission field lay outside the confines of the church gathering.[52]

Some interviewees used periodic missional events to keep the missional conversation fresh in their church's mind. Church leader 6 used a yearly vision Sunday to cast a fresh *missio Dei* vision before his congregation.[53] Church leader 10's church hosted a yearly mission conference where congregants were able to personally meet mission partners whom their church supported and could be recruited for many different mission opportunities in their local community, nation, and around the globe.[54]

Church Leaders Prioritized Outward-Focused Ministry

Revitalization leaders realize that their success depends on leading to abolish centipedal forms and philosophies of ministry.[55] The success of the church lies in the ability of the leader to push resources, people, and ministry outward into the community. The respondent revitalization leaders successfully instilled in their congregants a personal responsibility of ministry that joins the *missio Dei* in the community.

Leaders utilized different forms of mission ministry. Every church leader interviewed employed a different approach and strategy to executing missional ministry. While some leaders' churches were more successful than others, every church leader interviewed reported that their congregation was positively influenced by outward-focused ministry. This finding suggests that success in revitalization may be more

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[52] Church leader 3, interview by author, recorded phone call utilizing Tapeacall, February 5, 2020.

[53] Church leader 6, interview.

[54] Church leader 10, interview.

[55] J. R. Woodward and Dan White Jr., *The Church as Movement: Starting and Sustaining Missional-Incarnational Communities* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2016), 24.

dependent on sheer involvement in *missio Dei* ministry than the specific forms of how that ministry is practically executed.

Church leader 7 encouraged "folks to get outside the walls."[56] His church threw block parties in church members' neighborhoods. Church leader 6 and his church partnered with their local city to offer part of their church facility as a community center as a strategy to reach more elderly adults.[57] Several churches created ministry partnerships with both national and international churches. These partnerships allowed for many congregants to take a step into mission involvement through short-term trips and financial support. Church leader 5's church initiated ministry to low-income children in the community immediately surrounding the church.[58] Church leader 2's church created a large-scale strategy that included large ministry initiatives to the local community, such as drug rehabilitation and pregnancy homes, as well as many short-term mission trips to national and international locations.[59] Church leaders found that as they sent their people out, they came back affected, more equipped, and closer to Christ in ways that grew their congregation spiritually and numerically.

Outward-focused ministry cultivated church unity. Bill Henard points out that declining churches tend to be focused on their own personal needs, and when those needs go unmet, criticism and conflict erupt.[60] Churches that are focused on the needs of others have less time to engage in conflict based on the difference of preference or opinion. Change that showcased Christ's work in a group of people beyond the "same

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[56] Church leader 7, interview.

[57] Church leader 6, interview.

[58] Church leader 5, interview

[59] Church leader 2, interview.

[60] Henard, *Reclaimed Church*, chap. 8.

pool of believers" motivated church members to greater appetite for further change.[61] Church leader 2 noted that "when you keep mission in front of the people, they see that it's bigger than themselves and there's a lot less fussing or fighting."[62] Church leader 1 reflected, "There's nothing like a united local church. . . . We just have felt like as we become more united around this mission, the easier it becomes to see it executed. Because people are not bickering about other little things or arguing about their little want over here or there."[63]

Research Limitations

This research studied SBC churches from 2006 to 2016 to understand the phenomenon of church revitalization. The findings of this study drew from a specific population of churches within the Southern Baptist Convention: (1) those churches identified as meeting the criteria of revitalization and (2) those churches that identified mission as a major contributor to their revitalization efforts. From churches within the population experiencing revitalization, quantitative results can be generalized across the spectrum of churches. However, the data collected through the qualitative strand of the research (phase 3) may be transferable to churches in similar revitalization situations. The churches in the qualitative phase 3 interviews were also overrepresented by suburban churches in regard to the data acquired from the phase 2 quantitative data.[64]

Further Research

This study specifically focused on transforming the mission culture in church

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[61] Ed Stetzer and Thom Rainer, *Transformational Church: Creating a New Scorecard for Congregations* (Nashville: B&H, 2007), 13.

[62] Church leader 2, interview.

[63] Church leader 1, interview.

[64] Phase 3 consisted of 8 suburban churches (66 percent), 3 rural churches (25 percent), and 1 urban church (8.3 percent). while phase 2 consisted of 51 suburban churches (36.17 percent), 75 rural churches (53.19 percent), and 15 rural churches (10.63 percent).

revitalization in churches affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention. In the course of this study, several areas surfaced as potential opportunities for further study: (1) discover mission practices of successful churches, (2) discover spiritual growth in congregations resulting from missional ministry, (3) ministry context-specific study.

Discover Mission Practices of Successful Churches

The churches explored in this study employed a wide variety of missional practices that had some level of success in cultivating mission culture that led to revitalization. Missional practices included drug and rehabilitation centers, global church partnerships, short-term mission trips, and neighborhood block parties. A new study could discover which of these practices could be most effective for potential revitalizers. This type of study could describe which missional practices are most effective early on in mission culture cultivation and which practices are best to employ once mission culture momentum is established. Some level of change resistance could possibly be mitigated with a deeper discovery of the effectiveness of certain missional practices.

Discover Spiritual Growth in Congregations Resulting from Missional Ministry

The delimitations of revitalization for this study consisted of quantifiable data.[65] A study seeking to discover the essence of why mission culture leads to revitalization would be helpful for potential revitalizers. This study could help answer the question of why mission culture cultivation leads to revitalization.

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[65] The following are the qualifications a church had to meet to be included in the phase 2 quantitative portion of this study: (1) experienced less than 10 percent growth in average yearly worship attendance over five years prior to the turnaround, (2) experienced 10 percent or greater average yearly worship attendance in two of the following five years, while (3) also achieving a 20:1 average yearly worship-attendance-to-baptism ratio in those same years.

Ministry Context-Specific Study

This study looked at churches from three distinct ministry contexts: rural, suburban, and urban. A new study could build off this current research but focus more on churches in a specific ministry context. This type of study could also take into account church size and age. This kind of study could assist church leaders who are aiming to revitalize a large church compared to a small church or leaders who are aiming to revitalize an established church verses a newer church plant that could be dysfunctional.

Conclusion

The church in North America stands at a crucible moment. Many local churches have turned inward. Rather than chasing after the *missio Dei*, to seek and save those who are lost, they have focused on their own preferences, needs, and spiritual maturity, leading them toward decline and eventual church death. As churches continue to have their resources and ministry gravitate toward programs, staffing, and facilities that benefit them personally, the trend of decline will continue.

However, this research project promotes the good news that there is hope for declining inwardly focused churches. The work of revitalization is a heavy burden for the church leader, but while change can be a difficult and tedious process, the hope is that this study on transforming mission culture in church revitalizations can provide data, ideas, descriptions, application, and hope for church leaders leading for revitalization.

God has always been, and will always be, on mission. He has always been sending love, hope, and his Word into the world to reconcile the world to himself for his glory. As believers partner in the *missio Dei* through their union with Christ, not only will they experience personal growth but also the local congregation will experience the "blessed reflex" that leads to a symphony of spiritual and numerical growth in the

congregation for God's glory.[66] God is working to build for himself a people "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev 5:9). As congregations push outward with Christ, he will ensure that we obtain the "measure of the stature of fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13).

[66] Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today*, 296. Goheen posits that the mission advocates in the nineteenth century observed that the "missionary impulse would result in a reflex action that would rebound back on the sending church in the West, which would in turn reap some benefits of this missionary activity." Goheen notes that these "rebound" benefits were never explored fully because mission at that time was connected to colonialism. However, Goheen exclaims that this "dynamic of reflexive action is increasingly evident" today. Goheen credits a conversation with Wilbert Shenk for the terminology of "blessed reflex" and "reflexive action."

APPENDIX 1

REVITALIZATION SURVEY

The survey was administered via surveymokey.com. Words in bold represent the emphasis in the online survey for participants.

Demographic Information

1. Your **current** role with your church:
   - Pastor/Elder
   - Deacon
   - Staff
   - Volunteer

2. Your role **prior** to the revitalization process:
   - Pastor/Elder
   - Deacon
   - Staff
   - Volunteer
   - Not at the church

3. Your role **during** to the revitalization process:
   - Pastor/Elder
   - Deacon
   - Staff
   - Volunteer
   - Not at the church

4. Your church context is best described as:
   - Rural
   - Suburban
   - Urban

5. Briefly describe what ways your community has changed over the last 10 years and ways your church as sought to adapt.

6. Are you willing to participate in a follow up interview regarding the revitalization process at your church?

- Yes
- No

Interview Participation Contact Information

7. Contact information:
   - Name
   - Church Name
   - Church Address
   - Address
   - City/Town
   - State/Province
   - Zip/Postal Code
   - Church Website
   - Email Address
   - Phone Number

The Revitalization Process in General

8. Rate each ministry emphasis as to the importance it played in the revitalization process. (Highly Unimportant, Unimportant, Slightly Unimportant, Slightly Important, Important, Highly Important.)

   - Discipleship
   - Evangelism
   - Leadership
   - Missions
   - Prayer
   - Primary Worship Gathering
   - Other (please specify)

9. Reflecting on the change initiatives you have pursued in your church revitalization context, identify the area in which you have faced the **greatest** amount of **member resistance**.

10. Reflecting on the change initiatives you have pursued in your church revitalization context, identify the area in which you have faced the **greatest** amount of **member acceptance**.

Discipleship

11. Briefly describe the primary changes to the church's **discipleship ministry** which you perceive have contributed significantly to the revitalization process.

12. Select your level of agreement with the following statements concerning the church's discipleship ministry **during the revitalization process**. (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree.)

    - The church has a clearly defined discipleship process.
    - The majority of active members were able to explain the discipleship process.

    Which programmatic elements existed in the church's discipleship approach **during the revitalization process**? (Select all that apply.)

    - Age-graded Ministry (i.e. children, youth, college, adult)
    - Men's and/or Women's Bible Studies
    - Intergenerational Mentoring
    - Home-based Small Groups
    - Men's Ministry
    - Women's Ministry
    - One-on-one Type Discipleship Groups
    - Traditional Sunday School Model

13. Regarding the discipleship process, select the perspective which most closely represents the majority of active church members **at the beginning of the revitalization process**.

    - **A More Individualistic Mindset** (Members expect to select and shape most of their own discipleship process, with an emphasis on personal needs and intentional personal growth.)

    - **A More Collective Mindset** (Members expect spiritual leadership to guide them in their discipleship process with an emphasis on common needs and intentional relational and community growth.)

Evangelism

14. Briefly describe the primary changes to the church's **evangelism ministry** which you perceive have contributed significantly to the revitalization process.

15. Select your level of agreement with the following statements concerning the church's evangelism ministry **during the revitalization process**. (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree.)

    - There was a demonstrable increase in personal evangelism among active members of the church.
    - The majority of active members could communicate the gospel in a personal evangelism encounter.
    - The active members of the church regularly engaged in gospel conversations for the purpose of personal evangelism.

16. Briefly describe the type and frequency of evangelism training **currently** offered in your church.

Missions (including national and international efforts)

17. Briefly describe the primary changes to the church's **missions ministry** which you perceive have contributed significantly to the revitalization process.

18. Select your level of agreement with the following statements concerning the church's missions ministry **prior to the revitalization process**. (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree.)

    - The church had a vibrant missions ministry focused on financially supporting short-term and/or long term missionaries.

    - The church had a vibrant missions ministry focused on sending short-term and/or long-term missionaries from its own membership.

19. Select your level of agreement with the following statements concerning the church's **current missions ministry**. (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree.)

    - The church had a vibrant missions ministry focused on financially supporting short-term and/or long term missionaries.
    - The church had a vibrant missions ministry focused on sending short-term and/or long-term missionaries from its own membership.

Leadership

20. Briefly describe the primary changes to the church's **leadership structures** which you perceive have contributed significantly to the revitalization process.

21. Indicate how important each of the following leadership practices have been in the revitalization process in your ministry context. (Highly Unimportant, Unimportant, Slightly Unimportant, Slightly Important, Important, Highly Important.)

    - Building Momentum
    - Conceptual Thinking
    - Contextual Awareness and Planning
    - Developing Others
    - Getting Members Engaged
    - Gospel Orientation
    - Individual and Corporate Repentance
    - Information Seeking

- Initiative
- Interpersonal Understanding
- Missional Focus
- Organizational Awareness
- Relationship Building
- Teamwork and Cooperation
- Transparency
- Willingness to Confront/Church Discipline

22. Briefly describe the primary changes to the church's **leadership development processes** which you perceive have contributed significantly to the revitalization process.

23. Select your level of agreement with the following statements concerning the leadership development processes. (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree.)

    - **Prior to the revitalization process**, a culture of effective leadership development existed within the church.
    - Leadership development played a significant role in the revitalization process.

Prayer

24. Briefly describe the primary changes to the church's **prayer ministry** which you perceive have contributed significantly to the revitalization process.

25. Rate the following statements. (Highly Unimportant, Unimportant, Slightly Unimportant, Slightly Important, Important, Highly Important.)

    - The **church leadership's** dependence upon prayer as a vital means for realizing revitalization in your ministry context.
    - The **church congregation's** dependence upon prayer as a vital means for realizing revitalization in your ministry context.

26. Briefly describe your frequency and pattern of personal prayer **during the revitalization process.**

27. In what ways were the topic and act of prayer prioritized in corporate worship **during the revitalization process**?

Worship Gathering

28. Briefly describe the primary changes to the church's **primary worship gathering** which you perceive have contributed significantly to the revitalization process.

29. Please indicate what the most **difficult** element was to change in the primary worship gathering during the revitalization process and state the reason it was difficult.

30. Please indicate what the most **effective** element of change was in the primary worship gathering during the revitalization process and state the reason it was rewarding.

General Comments

31. What advice would you offer to a pastor seeking to lead a revitalization process?

APPENDIX 2

MISSION CULTURE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Demographic Information

1. Describe your ministry context? (type of community)
2. How many years have you been in ministry? How many years did you serve prior to the revitalization?
3. How many years have you served in your current role?
4. Describe your training and educational background?
5. What is your current age?
6. Describe your church? (size, demographics, etc.)

Mission Questions

1. Describe the mission culture before the revitalization.
2. Describe the changes in mission culture that contributed to revitalization.
3. Who primarily led/or affected the change in mission culture?
4. What resources were most helpful in transforming a culture of mission?
5. What intentional steps were implemented to develop mission culture?
6. The survey indicated short term and long term mission support/participation, were there any other missional priorities/practices that your church carried out?
7. What obstacles were encountered in developing mission culture?
8. How were these obstacles overcome?
9. Reflecting back, what would you have done differently regarding mission culture development?
10. How did the emphasis on mission culture contribute to the church's revitalization?
11. Have the mission culture initiatives remained in place since the revitalization?
12. What advice would you give to others seeking to revitalize their church?

APPENDIX 3

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your willingness to participate as part of the research project on Church Revitalization conducted by the research team under the supervision of Dr. Danny Bowen of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY.

This research is the most current and far-reaching of its kind, involving a study of SBC churches across the convention. You are part of a select, qualifying, group of churches based upon your Annual Church Profile (ACP) submissions in the recent past. Already, you have been helpful in completing the online research questionnaire and you have been selected to participate in a follow-up interview based on the responses you gave in the survey.

Below is the informed consent statement and the general questions that will serve as the backbone of a phone or video conference interview with Michael Richardson, one of the doctoral students conducting the research. His area of focus is specifically in the area of mission culture and its role in influence on the church's revitalization.

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify principles and practices that influenced the church's revitalization. This research is being conducted by Michael Richardson, under the supervision of Dr. Danny Bowen, of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for purposes of identifying principles and practices employed by pastoral leaders to influence the church revitalization. In this research, you will be asked to respond to several questions pertaining to your experience in leading your church in revitalization. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. By your completion of this interview, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

[ ] I agree to participate [ ] I do not agree to participate

Thank you for your help. I truly believe that the information we gather will assist thousands of pastors like yourself become more effective in leading their churches to experience revitalization.

Best regards,

Michael Richardson
Ed.D. Candidate
Mission Culture and Church Revitalization

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ABSTRACT

TRANSFORMING MISSION CULTURE IN CHURCH REVITALIZATION: A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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The North American church is on the edge of a precipice. The majority of churches are in need of revitalization. As churches turn inward and focus on their own personal preference, needs, and spiritual growth the church loses sight of their partnership and fellowship in the *missio Dei*. How can individual church leaders turn their congregants toward outward ministry and reignite their connection with the *missio Dei* in a way that grows individual believers and revitalizes the local church?

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between mission culture and church revitalization. Phase 1 of the study identified growing, declining and plateaued churches. In phase 2, churches that met the criteria for revitalization were invited to participate in a survey related to their experiences. In phase 3, select churches that identified mission culture as a significant influence on their revitalization participated in interviews. The study identified key factors on how the revitalized churches transformed mission culture in their church. The study also identified implications for church leaders and churches. Finally, research applications are discussed for church leaders and churches desiring revitalization.

Key words: leadership, mission, mission culture, organizational change, revitalization

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