



Revitalization Starting Points

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Revitalization Starting Points

One key to successful church revitalization/replanting is identifying the starting point. Where is this church currently at in terms of relationships, culture, history, leadership, theology and mission?

Churches have needed revitalization since the New Testament church began because churches are made up of sinners who individually and collectively need to be sanctified. Typically, churches go through seasons of growth and decline. Unfortunately, sometimes the decline is not addressed and the church continues to decline. The attendance numbers decline, the mission of the church fades into the background, programs are dropped or held onto regardless of their effectiveness. Those with less loyalty or stake in the game leave, which are often the younger people and change agents. The result is what is found in many declining churches, a small elderly congregation with little hope of surviving long term.

Replanting/Rebuilding/Revitalizing a church can be complex but understanding the starting point is critical. For most replant situations, it must begin with hiring a pastor committed to the scriptures, a pastor attuned to the 21st century culture and with the ability and patience to lead the church through change as the church learns how to communicate the gospel, live out the gospel and engage in effective mission, while growing to love one another and those in their community. This pastor needs to be a patient cata

Depending on the duration of the church's decline, there are four typical approaches for church revitalization/replanting based on the starting point:

Possible Revitalization Starting Points

- **Renew:**

- The basic structures are in place, but the church needs to embrace the biblical mission and wrestle with how to contextualize the message for the 21st century.
- The church needs a pastor who will help them realign their programs and mission to address today's communication preferences, cultural styles and complexities, in order to equip them to articulate the biblical message to their community.

- **Rebuild:**

- Church is concerned about the future, with declining numbers of people and finances.
- It is stuck in the past, with an outdated model of church. The service is traditional, with low energy, which meets needs of attendees but doesn't connect to a younger demographic and is thus ineffective in reaching the community.
- They need a revitalization pastor who can maintain unity and care for the congregation, while being a catalyst for new ministry and helping them navigate the significant changes required to most aspects of the church -- all of which are difficult, but far better than the alternative of closing.
- The rebuild pastor needs to continue to minister to the existing congregation, often keeping their traditional service going but who also can gain the freedom to begin new ministries and potentially services.

- **Replant:**

- Church has limited ability to keep church operating and not far from closing.
- Sunday only, with an outdated model of church. The service is traditional, with low energy, and no engagement with the community.
- They agree to suspend their bylaws and bring in a replant pastor who can be a catalyst for new ministry and help them navigate the significant changes required.
- The replant pastor will continue to shepherd the existing congregation, but focus will be on beginning new ministries to functionally start a new church in the existing building.

Determining the Starting Point

- **Restarting:**

- The church doesn't have enough people and/or money to be able to carry out the Sunday service of a typical church. The elderly congregation has neither the energy nor capacity to implement the significant change required to change the trajectory of the church from its steep decline.
- This can take several forms such as a merger, being enfolded into another congregation, or becoming a campus of a multi-site church.

A common mistake seen among church replanters is their failure to do the hard work of discerning the starting point of their church. If the church replanter fails to grasp the starting point then their plans and ideas are often unhelpful and will typically face resistance greater from the congregation.

The difficulty of determining the starting point is compounded by language. For example, the replanter often hears members of the congregation stating their agreement with the replanter's assessment that the church needs to grow. However, often their definitions of growth are very different. For some members, growth means bringing in just enough people to meet the budget but no more, since they like a very small church and the type of community that a small church brings them. For others, it means more people attend but not changing anything about the church or the worship service. For others, growth means going back to the glory days of old and re-introducing programs and ideas that worked fifty years ago. Almost always, the replanter's definition of growth is radically different.

Another difficulty that impedes understanding the church's starting point is generational values and fears. The typically replanter is younger and values what is new, hip and is given to leveraging technology. The average member of a replant church is typically older and values stability, control and history. There is deep meaning attached to each item in the church, to each event and each part of the event or service. Unless, the replanter understands, both intellectually and emotionally, the value system of those in the church, he or she is going to miss the real starting point.

Determining the Starting Point

If the revitalizer/rebuilder/replanter is going to grasp the actual starting point of the church, they are going to have to spend lots of time with individual members of the church. It will take many hours of listening to their stories, dialoging with them about the church and the community until the starting point will begin to take shape. It is not something the pastor can just think through, it takes prayer, input from others and the Holy Spirit giving insight.

Discovering the starting point of a replant church is time consuming and difficult. Overseed provide the following chart to allow a simple initial assessment of your church. This is just the beginning of determining the true starting point.

The following assessment will begin to help you identify what stage the church is at currently.

Stages of Church Decline

Revitalization					
Type	Replant	Rebuild	Renew		Healthy
Key Issue	Organizational Control	Theological Shift	Missional Drift		Gospel Driven
Key Identifiers	- Stage 4 - Walls Broken Down	- Stage 3 - 1/2 Walls There	- Stage 2 - No Gates	- Stage 1 - Need People	- Healthy Church - Growing Community
History	Long decline & conflict	Declining, conflictual	Living in the past	History controlling vision	Building ongoing history
Culture	Dysfunctional	Inward Focused	Traditional/institutional	Mission disconnect & conflict	Healthy
Leadership	Abdicated to 1 or 2	Power struggles, members control pastor	Competing visions, members taking sides	Silos & wrestling with vision	Unified moving vision forward
Structures	Disorganized, disrepair	Income < expenses mismanaged	Basic structures Income = basic expenses	Struggling with income vs vision	Using structure to accomplish vision
Congregation	Often non-Christian, older and <30 people	Divided, spiritually dry, older, <50 people	Some generation mix <80 people	Some spiritual growth and engagement in ministry <140 people	Growing, maturing, desire to serve
Ministry	Sunday Only	Sunday, pastoral care, community events	Sunday service, basic youth group, few small groups	Some ministry vision mismatch	Aligning ministries to vision, functioning as a local church
Missional Drift	No Mission	Social justice, no gospel	Growing inward focused	Mixed inward/outward focus	Becoming missional
Theological Shift	Bible irrelevant	Biblically illiterate, sin ok	Losing concern for theology	Orthodox but losing priority	Moving gospel into practice
Word Picture	Sinking	Damaged, taking on water	Adrift	Moving Slowly	Functioning
Typical Time to Reverse Stage	1-4 years	1-4 years	1-4 years	1-4 years	Ongoing

Determining the Starting Point

Determining the Starting Point

Quick Church Assessment Tool

Note: If your church seems in the middle of two numbers, default to the lower number.

Church History

<input type="checkbox"/> (1)	<input type="checkbox"/> (2)	<input type="checkbox"/> (3)	<input type="checkbox"/> (4)	<input type="checkbox"/> (5)
Long Decline Conflict	Declining Conflictual	Living In The Past	History Controlling Vision	Building Ongoing History

Culture

<input type="checkbox"/> (1)	<input type="checkbox"/> (2)	<input type="checkbox"/> (3)	<input type="checkbox"/> (4)	<input type="checkbox"/> (5)
Distrusting Ingrown Dysfunctional	Change Slow Vision Conflict Apathetic Submerged Tension Visitors Isolated	Traditional Institutional Resistant Few Lack of Unity	Mission Disconnect & conflict	Thankful Engaging Worship Living as a family Seeking to live out Vision

Leadership

<input type="checkbox"/> (1)	<input type="checkbox"/> (2)	<input type="checkbox"/> (3)	<input type="checkbox"/> (4)	<input type="checkbox"/> (5)
Abdicated to 1 or 2	Power Struggles People won't serve Moral failure Members vs Pastor	Competing Visions Opposition working behind the scenes Leader/Staff conflict	Good but silo leadership Wrestling with vision Staff/Leader levels consistent	Unified Moving vision forward

Structures

<input type="checkbox"/> (1)	<input type="checkbox"/> (2)	<input type="checkbox"/> (3)	<input type="checkbox"/> (4)	<input type="checkbox"/> (5)
Disorganized In Disrepair No Money	Income can't meet basic expenses Mismanaged	Basic structures in place Income meeting basic expenses	Struggling with vision vs income	Using structures to accomplish vision

Congregation

<input type="checkbox"/> (1)	<input type="checkbox"/> (2)	<input type="checkbox"/> (3)	<input type="checkbox"/> (4)	<input type="checkbox"/> (5)
Mostly NonChristian Hurt/Angry Nonengaged, Older <30 people	Divided Spiritual Dry <50 people	Generational mix Allusion of Safety Some embarrassed by church <80 people	Some Spiritual growth & ministry engagement <140 people	Growing, maturing Desiring to serve

Determining the Starting Point

Ministry

☐ (1) ----- ☐ (2) ----- ☐ (3) ----- ☐ (4) ----- ☐ (5)

Sunday service
No pastoral care

 Sunday service
Some CE
Some Pastoral care
Community events

 Sunday service
Basic youth group
Some small groups
and discipleship

 Sunday service
CE, Youth group
Small groups
Some ministry vision
mismatch

 Ministries aligned to
vision
Functioning as a local
church

Missions

☐ (1) ----- ☐ (2) ----- ☐ (3) ----- ☐ (4) ----- ☐ (5)

None

 Light giving
Social justice but
little gospel

 Growing inward
focused

 Mixed inward/outward
focus
Concern for community

 Becoming missional

Theology

☐ (1) ----- ☐ (2) ----- ☐ (3) ----- ☐ (4) ----- ☐ (5)

Bible is irrelevant

 Biblically illiterate
Sin is affirmed

 No overarching
theology or
concern about it

 Wrestling with gospel
and its implications
for life and ministry

 Moving gospel into
practice

Total Score: _____

Results Indicate:

Score	8-12	13-20	21-28	29-36	37-40
Stage	4	3	2	1	Healthy
Type	Replant	Rebuild	Revitalization		Healthy
Key Issue	Organizational Control	Theological Shift	Missional Shift		Healthy
Description	Wall Broken Down	½ the Walls are there	No Gates	Need People	Growing Community
Word Picture	Sinking	Damaged, taking on water	Adrift	Moving Slowly	Functioning
Time to Reverse Stage	1-4 years	1-4 years	1-4 years	1-4 years	Ongoing

