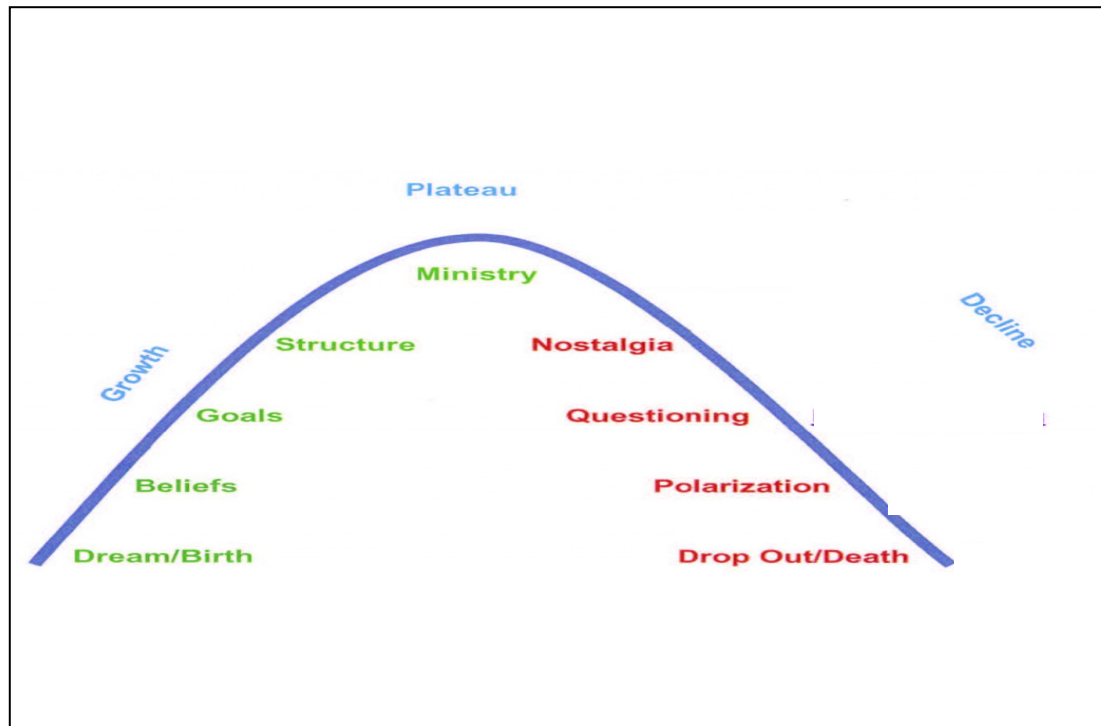


Revitalizing a Local Church Begins with a Plan

By: Church of God Mission North America GOFINISH Website Team

No church ever stays in perfect health. At some point most every church will realize the need for revitalization. Church revitalization is not a matter of “if”, it is a matter of “when.”

Every church goes through a “**life cycle**” beginning with a dream and a vision for the church and, in the last stage, the death of the church. It looks something like this:



It doesn't have to be this way. God can make any church come alive, but its people must turn to the Lord and **experience revitalization God's way**. Any church has the potential to experience what we call a “**God Turnaround.**” It is a proven truth that the further a church goes down on the right side of the bell curve the more difficult it is to return to health. Our team at Church of God Mission North America recommends creating a plan that can provide the framework to help a church experience a breakthrough and **start a new “life cycle.”** It begins right around the “**questioning**” point shown above.

There are basically **four types of churches** we see around us today:

1. **Declining** – Struggling to make budget, recruit leaders, and influence the community. Leaders are tired, frustrated, struggling to believe and dream.
2. **Existing** – Stable, making budget, celebrating each other's milestones, harvesting low hanging fruit. Not really successful in reaching the lost and little knowledge of the church in the community.
3. **Adding** – Slight growth each year, a few passionate and fruitful leaders on a pedestal

in the church and community. Growth rate probably below population growth rates. Inviting friends to church is easy. Some new people being reached, but transfer growth still a much greater percentage. Momentum is up and down with the calendar.

4. Multiplying – Growth at multiple levels – inside church and in the harvest fields, influence growing in the community, new leaders each year. A belief that something great is happening permeates the leadership. New people are being reached in the community. New ministries are springing up. Momentum makes work seem like play. **This is the one we are looking for—a multiplying church—a healthy church.**

Give the four church types listed above a “**slow read**” and then ask yourself these questions:

Which type describes our church?
Which will describe our church in 5 years?
Where do we want to be?
How can we get there?

Initially, the biggest challenge facing church leaders is **changing the perspective**. Churches in need of revitalization are usually in **survival mode** and they **have turned inward**. Many times very few people have been saved or baptized, and there are no new members added. The congregation goes into decline and has no vision. The congregation needs renewed hope and confidence that God has a plan for them—especially for their local church. In addition to perspective, churches need to **facilitate a mindset shift**. An action plan will provide a picture of what a stable church should look like.

A workable leadership approach is **learning to ask the right questions rather than attempting to provide the right answers**. Some of these questions are so simple. For example, “*What is God actually asking us to do?*” This powerful question leads us as individuals and as a congregation to interact with God. Psalm 40:5 says, “*The things you planned for us no one can recount to you; were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare.*” Another question is “*What can we do?*” Rather than focus on a pipe dream, we should inquire as to what God has positioned us to do.

Next, we must ask, “*What do we want to measure?*” The answer here is usually “**nickels and noses**—that would be the finance and the attendance. We feel it should be, “**We want to measure how many people meet Jesus and how many people serve.**” This goal can best be realized with the plan mentioned above. We call it a **strategic plan**. When applied to a local congregation, it becomes the **CAP-Church Action Plan**. It is a strategic or **long-range plan comprising of planning, organizing and putting plans into action.**” Revitalization is a slow process. It can easily take two to three years to revitalize a local church. This plan will allow for **reflection and decision-making**. It is designed to provide the local church congregation with a summary of the goals of the church and a **vision for the future**. It is a valuable tool that is **both spiritual and practical**. It is **spiritual** because it is not just a document that is produced in a void. The action plan should be prayerfully considered and created with the leadership and laity in mind. It is **practical** because it lays out objectives, goals and plans in a way that will help you

and the local church move forward towards greater church health. An action plan is a **living document** and can be **updated and modified** on a periodic basis. One lead pastor who successfully revitalized his church said, *“The action plan is not a bible, but I have it on the same shelf as my bible!”* He told us how he consulted it regularly to make sure he was headed in the right direction.

An action plan does three things: (1) it helps in understanding the dynamics and details of the **new direction of the church**, (2) it helps **communicate this information to key leaders and allows them to be a part of the effort**, (3) it helps in the **process of inviting other leaders and laity to join in** and participate. Many local churches have people who truly want change and want to be involved in the change process. It is not about doing something *to* the church but doing something *with* the church. We encourage pastors to not try to just “fix things” in the church. Rather, as a shepherd, we encourage pastors and leaders to **be with them** [laity and members]. The local church leadership should **listen** carefully and **lead** collaboratively. By looking outward and focusing on God’s mission together, amazing things can happen.

Here’s the summation: a **Church Action Plan (CAT)** can produce **EPIC** momentum in the local church congregation. By **EPIC** we mean it is an opportunity to **“Experience, Participate, Interact and Collaborate.”** This will give church leaders an opportunity to work together with the laity to **produce a document that everyone can agree upon** and result in a powerful, cooperative effort. As a result of going **EPIC**, the local church leaders and membership will learn to work together as never before. Everyone should be a part of the process to produce the final product.

You will experience failures and successes. Remember the words of Ben Franklin:

If you fail to plan you are planning to fail!

Special note:

Mission North America offers a free generic structural plan that provides the framework for local church leaders to create a personalized **Church Action Plan**. If interested contact:

Mission North America

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