REVITALIZATION + TECHNOLOGY

In a world dominated by technology, churches must be prepared to reach their members and culture in new ways.

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A CASE FOR ASSIMILATION

IF YOU’RE A CHRISTIAN, YOU’RE A MISSIONARY

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5 HABITS OF EVANGELISTIC CHURCHES

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SUNDAY SCHOOL’S ROLE IN REVITALIZATION

RURAL CHURCH REVITALIZATION
DEAR CHURCH LEADER

God can make any church come alive, but its people must turn to the Lord and experience revitalization God’s way. The entire Church Revitalization process of the SBTC is based on transferable principles from the Word of God for the people of God. Our desire is to come alongside the local church to join you on your journey to restore the church to be the beacon of hope for a community in need of Jesus.

Whether you are on a plateau, just beginning a slump, or faced with the uncertainty of how to continue proceeding forward, our methods and processes can assist you in determining what your next steps should be. Contact us at the SBTC. We are here to serve you.

In His Service and Yours,

Kenneth Priest, Director
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2017 DATES // CONVENTION STRATEGIES

January 12
Church Revitalization Lab // Grapevine SBTC
January 19
Church Revitalization Lab // San Antonio, Parkhills BC
February 9
Church Revitalization Conference // Criswell College
March 30 – April 1
Advance Now Weekend // San Antonio
April 9
CP Sunday
April 13
NAMB/Church Revitalization Conference // SBTC, Grapevine
May 4
Role of the Pastor Conference // SBTC, Grapevine
June 10
Crossover, SBC // Phoenix, AZ
June 11 – 12
Pastor’s Conference // Phoenix, AZ
June 13 – 14
SBC Annual Meeting // Phoenix, AZ
October 5 – 6
Strategic Growth Forum // SBTC, Grapevine

CHURCH Revitalization
Biblically Based Principles for Renewed Growth
sbtexas.com/revitalization

SBTC 5-TRACK REVITALIZATION APPROACH

1. **REVITALIZATION & RENEWAL** For churches which have plateaued or experienced decline. Particularly suited to churches wanting to make changes one project at a time.

2. **RE-ENGINEERING** For churches in substantial decline or in need of a “total makeover.” The systems-oriented approach will be to get the church healthy and functional again.

3. **RE-START/REPLANT** For churches “near death,” this track offers the hope of beginning again as mission of a sponsoring congregation.

4. **MERGER/ACQUISITION** For a healthy church wanting to help a declining church, or two churches merging to form a healthy church.

5. **LEADERSHIP DRIVEN** An SBTC revitalization pastor leads a church to renewal, or a healthy church comes alongside to assist in revitalization.

5 Revitalization Principles

every church needs to experience

1. A fresh, biblically based vision from the Lord
2. Restored unity of the people
3. Mobilizing members to do the will of the Lord
4. Renewed commitment to outreach & evangelism
5. Life-giving empowerment by the Holy Spirit

In order to see these things become realities, we provide help for pastors & the church as a whole.
### The Possibilities Are ...
When thinking through church revitalization, a pastor must know what the possibilities are in his present context. To know these, the pastor must first know his present reality.

### The Case for Assimilation
The topic of “assimilation” does not create the same buzz as some topics, but I suggest that it is one of the more important issues of church revitalization and church growth.

### If You’re a Christian, You’re a Missionary
Making Disciples that Make Disciples

### The Missing Link
Making Disciples that Make Disciples

### Vetting Criteria for Vision, Strategy, Ministry and Personnel Initiatives

### Baker’s Dozen: Decision-Making Approaches

### Sink Surface Swim
Do You Have Plumblines for Your Church’s Decisions?
God can make any church come alive, but its people must turn to the Lord and experience revitalization God’s way. The five revitalization principles of church renewal every church needs to experience are:

- A fresh, biblically based vision from the Lord
- A restored unity of the people
- Mobilization of the membership to do the will of God
- A renewed commitment to outreach and evangelism
- Life-giving empowerment by the Holy Spirit

In order for this to become a reality in the life of the church, the SBTC Church Revitalization program partners with pastors to assist in moving the church through spiritual renewal and revitalization. The entire Church Revitalization process is based on transferable principles from the Word of God for the people of God.

**Revitalization Methods**

- Revitalization
- Renewal
- Re-engineering
- Replant/Restart
- Leadership Driven
- Merger/Acquisition

**Revitalization & Renewal**

These approaches can take on several looks, and is encouraged for support of any method of revitalization endeavors. The SBTC uses two basic options:

1. **Ezekiel Project**: This is a curriculum based approach utilizing video-driven curriculum in order to provide strategic focus on the spiritual renewal of the church. There are two series, Spiritual CPR (6 weeks) and Making Change (6 weeks).

2. **Sermon Based Small Groups**: This approach is more detailed and requires more involvement from the pastor. A 13-week sermon series is preached which focuses on the specific thematic approach to revitalization. Small groups (whether Sunday school on Sunday mornings or at another time during the week) reinforce or complement the pastor’s sermon. The series is provided by the SBTC, but is designed as a beginning point for the pastor to prepare. The topic for the week is provided and the text, but it is the responsibility of the pastor to develop his own sermons contextualizing for his unique church. The small group material has a beginning commentary and questions for use, but the pastor will need to supplement the material with additional commentary and questions. Since the SBTC is not dictated specifically what to preach regarding each topic, we cannot provide a full lesson for the small group time. Additional sermon helps and teaching helps are provided through the Church Revitalization channel of sbtexas.com/online.

   At the end of either series, the pastor conducts a town hall meeting with the church to discuss key ministry initiatives which the church should engage. These become the vision path for the church. No more than three should be initiated. Any above that become the future ministries of the church.

**Re-engineering**

This approach utilizes church assessments and consultations to determine where the church presently is and the outcomes of where it needs to go. Through this process all program ministries in the church are evaluated along with facilities and finances. The end result is a new vision path for the church with ministries re-engineered to meet the present needs of the community context in order to more effectively minister and reach the community for the cause of
Christ. The church does not look the same as when it starts the process as everything is on the table to be re-engineered for effectiveness.

**Replant/Restart**

This approach closes the doors of the church for a season (sometimes weeks, sometimes months). The church dissolves from existence on paper. A church planter is sent in to develop a core team. The church changes its name, new by-laws, and newly constitutes. Updates are made to the facilities as necessary. The church then relaunches with a new vision and strategy for engaging the community. A sponsor church is involved and sends in the planter (typically). The sponsor church is heavily involved to insure an effective launch. The SBTC Church Revitalization Team hands this model off to the Church Planting Team as it is a plant. Church Revitalization Team remains involved in assisting the planter in coaching the existing members for spiritual renewal.

**Leadership Driven**

This may happen in several different models.

**MODEL 1:** A healthy church has a desire to assist a church in decline. The declining church comes under covenant relationship with the healthy church. The healthy church provides leadership (typically replacing the pastor with a staff member from the healthy church). The healthy church typically sends in a core leadership team to assume, or pick-up, many volunteer positions which need to be filled. The healthy church invests in the church facilities, scheduling work projects around the campus to restore the facilities to full functionality. The declining church suspends all leadership control and agrees to function under the by-laws and constitution of the healthy church for the term of the covenant. The covenant relationship could be as short as one year, or up to five years, depending on the need of the declining church. (For this model, think the old Mission Church model. Whenever a mission church was started out of a church, it would build to a healthy position and then would spin-off. That is the goal here. Sometimes however, the church after spinning off, would go through a downturn and have to “revert back” to mission status. That is essentially this model).

**MODEL 2:** A declining church which is without a pastor (occasionally this is done with an existing pastor who is willing to submit to the training and development needed). The SBTC provides a list of Revitalization Pastors from which to select. These pastors have gone through training and on-going continuing education in revitalization of the local church. The church selects a Revitalization Pastor. The SBTC moves into a covenant relationship with the pastor and the church; this is a three-way covenant agreement. The pastor implements a spiritual renewal methodology utilizing the sermon-based small group approach of the SBTC’s. In this model, consultations are conducted to determine the financial feasibility of the church. If there is financial lacking the SBTC may come alongside the church and provide grant funds to assist in paying the pastor’s salary for a season. The covenant agreement is for six month intervals, not to extend beyond two additional re-signs, for a total of eighteen months. At the end of the eighteen months, the Revitalization Pastor will have assisted the church in getting their search committee trained and in conducting a search for the new pastor. The end goal of this model is a revitalizing church and the new pastor being called during the eighteenth month of the process.

**Merger/ Acquisition**

This model is where a healthy church acquires a declining church OR two churches merge together for the purpose of creating a healthy church. The SBTC philosophy is, this is a last resort model. As a matter of practice, the SBTC does not want to lose any preaching points in Texas. As the population continues to grow and the cultural diversity expands, every campus is needed to reach Texas and thereby reach the nations.
Revitalization Process

Declining Congregation

Evaluation/Assessment

Re-Engineering
- Additional Assessments/Consultations
- Address Church Programming
- Launch New Initiatives

Revitalization & Renewal

Leadership Driven
- Financial & Leadership Feasibility Study
- Call Revitalization Pastor?
- Launch Spiritual Renewal Process Using SBTC Methodologies
- See Revitalization & Renewal Directions

Replant
Connect with Church Planting Team

Merger/Acquisition
Connect with Healthy Church for Takeover

Curriculum Based
Use Spiritual CPR Materials

Determine Methodology

Sermon Based
Use SBSG Materials

Assessment
Every 6 Months/Continued Coaching

Revitalization of Church
Steps for Pastoral Support

Pastor Engages SBTC in Revitalization

Assessment/Evaluation of Revitalization Method

Launch Revitalization Method

Pastoral Support
- Pastor’s Retreat
  Annual retreat for revitalization development held for pastor & spouse
- Strategic Growth Forum
  Revitalization strategy development forum
- Online
  Pastor has access to online revitalization courses
- Mentoring
  Regional mentor works with pastor through entire revitalization process
people (Internal)

The first area to address in understanding the present reality in your church is, who do you have? How many senior adults, median adults, young adults, students, children, preschoolers; married, single, divorced, widowed, long-time Christians and/or new Christians, deacons, teachers, committee members, etc. In addition to the age demographic, there is the question of what is your racial/ethnic make-up as well. Is the church all one homogenous group or multi-ethnic? Once you know for certain who you have, you can then decide what you need. The question of what you need is based on how many you have; whether 15 or 150, there is a right answer on what you need for the church to be best positioned for the future.

A good rule of thumb is to have one leader for every eight members. This rule allows you to disciple a few people at a time for the purpose of fulfilling leadership roles in the church as the need arises. As you equip one man to be a deacon, he can then mentor other men to be deacons when the timing is right for other deacons to come on board. Similarly, you can disciple someone as a teacher, and then they can begin to disciple others to be teachers, thereby reproducing the ministry of the church and your ministry as the pastor. This frees you up as the senior pastor to move on to the next needed area.

people (External)

The second area to address is, “where are you planted?” This has everything to do with community context. You must consider who lives in the community surrounding the church. The church is to be a lighthouse for the community in which it is planted. So at this stage, you should not worry about the person driving from afar (unless you are in a rural community and all are driving from afar). Your focus must be on the surrounding community. Is this a community of senior adults or young singles? Are they retired professionals, young working class, middle-aged lower class? Who lives, works, and plays around your church? Then, what are the ethnicities? Reading demographics can assist with this, but nothing is better than boots-on-the-ground work in this case. Drive through the neighborhoods, or better yet, walk the community. Treat the day as a prayer walking opportunity and look for signs of who is
there and needs ministry. Is it the down and out or the up and coming?

Make a people map of your church and your community. (For more information on how to create a people map, feel free to email me).

Facilities

The next area to address is the campus you have. In revitalization, often times the property takes the first hit. As finances decrease, many churches begin neglecting their campus. Therefore, a thorough examination of the condition of the facilities must first be taken into account. Even if you think, “it’s not that bad around here,” the question you have to ask is, if you went to a restaurant or some other hospitality industry, would you be pleased as a paying customer with the way things look? I know, your first answer is, “Well, people do not pay to come to church, they should be coming because the presence of God is there.” If that is your first thought, and you are in need of revitalization, one might be tempted to pull out the Dr. Phil quote of “how’s that working for ya?” The reality is, the lost and unchurched are not necessarily seeking after God’s presence. They really do not know what they need. Typically they are coming to the church because they were invited by a friend or family member. You never have a second chance to make a great first impression. We must create the right environment in order to eliminate any obstacles to sharing the gospel with a lost person.

Once you know the property is in good condition, or determined action steps to correct where it is not, you should create a facility usage map. This is a blueprint of your campus that lists what each room is used for, what equipment is available in the room, and what the capacity for the room is, based on standard growth dimensions.

Using this info, you take the square footage in a room, divide it by the age group listed above, and then you have the number of persons for that age group who could fit in the room. Second is to multiply by 80 percent, this is your growth cap. Once a room reaches 80 percent capacity, it is considered full. You should have a plan in place to create a new unit, or move this group to a new room by the time it reaches this capacity line.

Additional facility considerations look at fellowship hall, multipurpose space, gym/recreation area, fields for softball, soccer, etc.

Once you have determined “what” you have on property, and how many can fit in your rooms, you can begin to address programming questions and develop outreach strategies. For example, if you have fields not being used, or gyms not being used, could the church start an Upward-type league? Or is there an existing program in the community which is in need of more space and you can connect with them for using your facilities. This allows you to get people on your campus and not be the ones responsible for actually scheduling the programming or recruiting the volunteers to run the event. A church in need of revitalization, must get creative in how it uses its campus, and how it does outreach. Have a brainstorming time with key leaders to think through these types of opportunities and see what is needed in the community that your church could provide.

Programming questions should center around what the greatest needs are in the community which your church can address. Again, look at your people map, and the internal people you have. What can you address in your community? Is one of your members a financial planner? Offer a course such as Financial Peace. Is someone a counselor, offer marriage enrichment. If you do not have these skills in your church, what do you have? People who love kids and are concerned about the next generation, offer Kid’s Beach Club.

This is where the pastor has to be the prophetic voice. You have done all the above work to see what you have and who you have. Now you must develop a plan. This is knowing the possibilities.

So what are the possibilities… well that’s for God to show you, and for you to follow through with his leadership.

Kenneth Priest serves as the SBTC Director of Convention Strategies. He has been leading revitalization endeavors since 2008 with the SBTC. He holds a Doctor of Educational Ministry degree with an emphasis in Church Revitalization from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, MO. Contact Kenneth at kpriest@sbtexas.com.
I wish I had taken my own advice when I started to have a book published. I had always said that I had much rather people ask me, “Why don’t you write a book?” than to have people ask me why I did write a book. But alas, I didn’t listen to my own good counsel and ultimately turned my doctoral project from Southwestern Seminary into a practical book entitled *Beyond the Plateau: Hope and Help for the Small and Medium-sized Church*. My main motivation was not to garner attention as an author. The thing that pushed me was the fact that there are so many pastors who are struggling in small and medium churches, and it’s hard to wrap their hearts and minds around the church growth books written by megachurch pastors, church planters, and statisticians. As valuable as all of these are, it’s just tough for the small church pastor to identify with them and their suggested models.

So this book dealt with principles rather than programs. There is nothing profound about any of them. They have all been discussed ad infinitum in most of the church growth and revitalization studies. What I did that might be a little bit different is that for nearly 50 years of ministry, I have lived these principles out in small and medium churches that have seen revitalization and renewed growth. One was in a university town, the little forgotten neighborhood church about to go under. Another was in a metropolitan suburb, a church that overbuilt in a transitioning neighborhood. Still another was in an inner-city setting with multiple ethnic ministries. But three of the churches I have been privileged to pastor were and are in the rural setting. All three of them had reached a growth plateau or were in decline.

I simply adapted the principles from the book to those rural situations and two of the three experienced total revitalization. The one that didn’t see revitalization was not because of the principles, but rather rests solely on my shoulders. I simply didn’t stay there long enough. At First Baptist Church of Heath, near Rockwall the attendance went from about 60 to about 230. In addition at the church I am presently serving, the attendance has gone from about 30 to averaging about 85. While I know that attendance is not...
the sole or even the most important criteria, it is a visible mark of something changing.

The principles are the sovereignty of God, prayer, authority, evangelism, leadership, atmosphere, visibility, and vision. The first three have to do with God’s involvement in the process. He must be working and at the center of anything that is done. Everything must be saturated in prayer. The Bible is our only authority for doing what we do. The next four speak of our involvement in the process. Evangelism is the only justification for existing. The church has a message to deliver. Leadership must be exhibited, developed and delegated. An atmosphere of love, warmth and acceptance needs to be established and maintained. Visibility is indispensable as the community surrounding the church must know that a church exists and know that the church is there for the community. The last principle, vision, brings us back to God’s work in and through the church. A vision must be developed so that the entire church is on the same page with God as to why they exist in their particular context.

Now, how do these relate to revitalization in the rural church setting? There are definite ways that these principles speak to the rural church. First, there is evaluation. Second, consider adaptation. Third, think about the application. And finally, exercise determination.

1. EVALUATION Someone has observed that on a journey, if you don’t care about your destination, then anyplace you wind up will do. That is true, but it is also true that if you don’t know where you are it will be difficult to know where you want to go. When it comes to revitalizing the rural church, the diagnostic process may be the most difficult part. The reason is that you have to be brutally honest about where you are. The evaluation process involves asking questions about your setting, the population around you, the potential for reaching people and the condition of the church. You have to evaluate not only the possibilities, but also the current situation. Are the people looking for the next new program or do they seek to be totally dependent upon God? Is prayer something the church is engaged in as a side issue, or does prayer play a vital role in the church’s life? Is the Word of God the central message of the church and its auxiliary activities? Can you identify potential leadership? What does the appearance of the church buildings say to the community? Is the community aware that the church is there? Is there a spirit of defeat evident through the membership? Is the atmosphere created at church gatherings warm and inviting? Are the people friendly and welcoming? Are there power groups or people giving direction to the church, for good or bad? Does the church currently have a vision for the present and for the future? This painful process is absolutely necessary in order to get to where you long to be in the revitalization process.

2. ADAPTATION Once the present reality of the church has been assessed, then the adaptation of the principles must begin. What many people miss in this part of the process is that every church is different, even if there are similarities. In order to adapt principles to the revitalization process, one has to see how they fit in your unique situation. For example, the rural setting in which I work today is a ranching community with primarily retired people. Many of these people have retired from corporate life and have been a part of larger metro-area churches, but have retired to a less-hurried, simpler life style. They have both resources and time to contribute to the ministry. Another rural church, however, may be in a farming community, where the average age is younger, and the work load of the people much heavier. Every church is different. Whereas the
area I am in prefers old hymns with a country touch, your community might prefer a different approach to worship. Adapt to where you are. Don’t attempt to convince people that they need to adapt to a foreign approach just because it worked in the suburban church where you used to be. Our foreign missionaries have to learn how to adapt to the culture they are serving. The same is true here in the good old USA. You have to adapt to where you are, not where you would like to be.

3. APPLICATION Once you know where you are, and you have a pretty good idea of how to adapt these principles to your situation, you then have to begin to apply them. This is not easy, because you can’t do it alone. You have to bring the people along with you and it takes time. A good way to approach this phase is to give the people ownership of the principles. Teach them these various principles and ask them to tell you how they relate to your church. After all, they know more about your church than you do, in spite of all of your training and preparation. Start setting in motion the ideas that come from your people. Put them in charge of the steps as you go. It’s not deceitful for them to think they came up with the ideas. It’s called working with the folks God has given you.

4. DETERMINATION It will take determination to spend the necessary time in order to see revitalization to take place. As long as a pastor sees his rural setting as a stepping stone to something bigger and better, the probability is not very high that revitalization will take place. I was at my first rural church for a little over ten years. I am starting my ninth year at the church I am now serving. It takes time and determination. I actually turned down the search committee from my “ideal, dream” church a few years ago, because I had only been here a couple of years. I’m not saying it is easy, but if you are convinced that God wants to use you in revitalizing a rural church, you can’t keep looking beyond the horizon. You must be determined to stay long enough to let God use you.

Blessings as you evaluate, adapt, apply, and stick to it.
is an increasing awareness of the decline in baptisms in the Southern Baptist Convention. At the same time, 30 percent of our churches are declining and another 40 percent of our churches have plateaued. So what is the key to helping these churches?

For a long time churches have known you can do programs like Evangelism Explosion, Continuing Witness Training, WIN Schools and FAITH and see little long-term effect in the church. The reason is that these are programs to teach people how to share their faith. It does not change their hearts and develop a burden for the lost. Many times the focus is on the presentation and making sure you present it. When someone is led to a saving faith in Christ, it is tough to have good follow-up.
Churches may do one or two follow-up visits, but churches very rarely see that person become an active member of the church, much less a disciple. The reason is most of the time there is no relationship with the person, so he or she does not become a disciple. Evangelism that produces the best fruit happens in the context of relationships. This is best accomplished in our churches today through Sunday school.

When someone invites a friend to church, and he or she starts to investigate the claims of Jesus, they come to Sunday school, and the odds are they will be saved within one year. Because of the relationships that now exist, he or she will continue to read and study God’s word and start applying it to their lives. Through Sunday school relationships, the new convert becomes assimilated and begins the path to spiritual growth. This is the most fruitful strategy to evangelism.

The question is, “Why are so many churches with Sunday School not growing?” The reason is they have let Satan divert them into a program which focuses on the study of the Bible and fellowship. They forget the purpose of Sunday school is to be the reaching arm of the church. They do not invite people to church or Sunday school; instead, they focus on attending with their friends and studying the Bible. If a church wants to change its growth pattern from declining or plateaued, it must address the issue of getting outside the walls and inviting their friends, relatives, co-workers and neighbors. Churches with a focus on the primary task of its members to invite people to their class in an effort to see them become Christians are the churches making a difference in their communities and growing. We have to focus on reaching the lost. In Sunday school, we must start praying more for those who are lost than for all the physical ailments of our members. When our members develop a burden to pray for the lost, they will develop a burden to see them saved. Unless our members have a burden, it doesn’t matter how many salvation presentations they make; they will not share because there is no burden. Simply put, they do not care enough.

Evangelism Explosion, Faith, and other training programs like these are not evangelism programs; they are discipleship programs to teach members how to share their faith. It is very important for all members to learn how to share their faith. That is part of the discipleship process. The problem with many discipleship programs is that they do not teach individuals how to share their faith. This program was started by Jesus when he sent his followers out two by two. To be a complete disciple, one must be like Jesus and not only be able, but willing to share about Jesus wherever they go. Their most fruitful evangelism efforts will be in the context of their relationships.

Repeatedly, people have told me it is easier to share with someone totally unknown to them than people they are the closest to. I believe this is Satan’s way of keeping Christians from being effective. If we really had a burden, we would share with those closest to us. Surveys of churches tell us that as many as 94 percent of members have not shared their faith with anyone during the last year. This has to change.

Two of the more famous young pastors in our convention recently shared on a video showing that it is easier for them to share Jesus from the pulpit than with people one on one; therefore, they do not do it much. In talking with many pastors, I find a great number of them are
not personally sharing Jesus on a regular basis outside the pulpit. How can we expect our members to do it if we do not do it? Church members are looking to their leaders to model what the Christian life is all about.

If we want to see the number of baptisms go up in the Southern Baptist Convention and if we want to see our declining and plateaued churches start growing again, we have to start teaching them that the Bible says it is every Christian’s job, and not just the job of the paid church staff, to share the gospel. While we do not need to reduce the gospel to “Come and Hear,” the beginning step of sharing for many members is to invite a friend, relative or neighbor to church.

We have to encourage our members, through their Sunday school classes, to:

1. IDENTIFY LOST PEOPLE THEY KNOW
2. START PRAYING FOR THOSE PEOPLE TO COME TO A SAVING FAITH
3. INVITE THEM TO THEIR SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES
4. REALIZE THAT AS THESE PEOPLE ATTEND SUNDAY SCHOOL, THEY WILL BE SAVED
5. HELP VISITORS CONTINUE TO GROW THROUGH THE STUDY OF GOD’S WORD IN THEIR SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES
6. HELP THOSE PERSONS TO REACH OUT TO OTHER LOST PEOPLE THEY KNOW AND START THE PROCESS OVER AGAIN

This process is the most effective method I have seen work in helping churches grow. May God bless your church as you get back to his Great Commission.

For pastors seeking to lead their church in a turnaround. Time will be spent on the SBTC church revitalization methods.

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Revitalization LABS

January 12
SBTC, Grapevine

January 19
Parkhills BC, San Antonio

10am - 3pm

SBTEXAS.COM/REVITALIZATION

COST FREE
The topic of “assimilation” does not create the same buzz that church growth, evangelism, innovation in worship, and other such topics might create at a seminar, but might I suggest that it is one of the more important issues of church revitalization and church growth. Without an effective strategy of assimilation, we will constantly struggle to be effective as it relates to the priority of the Great Commission.

THE IMPERATIVE

The imperative in the Great Commission is “make disciples.” It takes relationships and time to make disciples and thus assimilation becomes the key to the disciple-making task. In truth, I think that assimilation is actually mandated by the three participles which define the disciple making task in Matthew 28:19-20. The participles are “going,” “baptizing,” and “teaching.” We normally explain “going” in terms of evangelizing. I often translate “baptizing” as “congregationalizing” which is broader and more comprehensive than simply the act of baptizing a new believer in water. In 1 Corinthians 12:13 Paul indicates that we are all baptized by one Spirit into one body. This reference is found right at the heart of his discussion of the church as a gifted body. Thus the Spirit places the new believer in Christ and in his body the church. It is this act of incorporation into the church (assimilation) that becomes the critical link between “going” (evangelizing) and “teaching” (equipping or discipling).

THE TRAGIC REALITY

Tragically many churches have no established process for the assimilation of new members into the body of Christ. When I pastored First Baptist, Norfolk, we had an aggressive outreach strategy which involved numerous contacts beginning the Sunday immediately after the first visit to our church and culminating with an evangelistic visit in the home. One evening I was visiting with a friend from college days who had recently joined our church and was actually on my evangelism team. As we were driving home from a visit, he asked me if I wanted to know what it was like to join First Baptist. From the tenor of the question, I wasn’t sure I wanted to know but knew that I needed to know. He indicated that as a visitor he received numerous calls and contacts indicating the great interest the church had in him and his family. However, after he joined, the contacts ceased after he got his welcome letter from the pastor with his tithing envelopes included.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF RESOURCE

A few years ago, I joined with a former staff member from my Norfolk
days to write a book to help churches to think strategically about their assimilation process. We called it *V.E.L.C.R.O. Church*. We wanted a process that would help people “stick” to the church. We intended it to be a totally different kind of church growth book. This one is designed to be studied by the laity rather than read by the clergy. Too many growth ideas go unimplemented because they are met with resistance when introduced by the pastor or staff. The approach in our book is based on the core conviction that nothing changes anyone’s mind but the Word of God applied by the Spirit of God. Thus each of the six chapters begins with Bible study, followed by a section of application questions, and then three sets of “Velcro” suggestions.

**AN OVERVIEW OF THE VELCRO PROCESS**

**Value.** In truth, the process of assimilation usually begins before a visitor walks in the door of your church for the first time. As we will see in a few moments, assimilation is about relationships and they are the key to making people feel wanted at your church. The first letter in Velcro is “v” and it stands for “Valuing Every Person as a Gift from God.” A large percent of the people, some estimate as high as 87 percentage, attend the church they attend today because they were brought to the church by a friend or relative. Teach and encourage your people to invite and bring their friends to church. The process of assimilation first begins with a friendship outside the church and continues as they are welcomed by the church family.

**ENGAGE.** Once we have developed a strategy for helping people bring their friends to an event sponsored by the church, it is essential to develop a consistent and effective plan for engaging each guest with intentionality. This process begins in the process and must be carried throughout the entire time that a guest is on your campus. While it is important to have persons who are tasked with welcoming guests, this intentional spirit of hospitality must go beyond the “first impressions” team and must become the culture of the entire church.

**LEAD.** Our ultimate goal is to introduce all our friends to our best friend, Jesus. We are sometimes intimidated by the idea of evangelism. Nothing should be more natural or enjoyable than sharing with a friend the story of your life and relationship with Christ. Each church must have an effective plan for training people to build relationships with lost people, meeting needs in the name of Christ, and sharing the good news.

**CONNECT.** A baby is born into a family and a newborn believer should be birthed into the family of God. This is a critical juncture in the process of assimilation and cannot be taken for granted. We “assume” that new believers and newcomers to our church will find their place in the body. We can’t assume! Whether you call your small groups Sunday school, cell groups, connect groups, or whatever, the larger a church becomes the smaller it must become. Recent studies have convincingly shown that the attachment to a small group is the essential factor in retaining persons in the church.

**RELATIONSHIPS.** The reason that small groups are vital is that relationships are the key to assimilation. If people do not feel wanted and vital they will eventually drop out of church. Are your small groups designed so that they help people develop relationships? Here is where homogeneity and receptivity, two vital growth principles come into focus. Effective small groups will capitalize on these twin growth principles.

**ORGANIZE.** Don’t assume that if you enroll someone in a small group, your job of assimilation is complete. Each small group must be organized so that regular contact with each member is maintained and appropriate ministry is conducted. We suggest you apply the I.S.S.E. formula as you are organizing your small groups for ongoing care—Intentional, Sustainable, Simple, and Expandable. In each section we make suggestions that will help you to develop your own Velcro strategy for sticking members to Christ and his body, the church.
If you’re a Christian, you’re a missionary

By Shane Pruitt
SBTC Missions Director

A simple explanation of missions is that we have a glorious king who has rescued us into his kingdom, and now we get to love him, worship him, and tell the world about him so others will love, worship and share him.

So, what is a missionary? Often, the image that comes to mind are those “superstar” Christians who have their pictures on the back walls of our churches, who get on planes and wear cargo-pants; coming back once a year to offer slide-show presentations. In no way should we belittle that view of missionaries. Thank God for those who surrender their lives to share the love of Jesus on foreign soil. They definitely are missionaries, but they’re also not the only ones.

Believe it or not, Wikipedia gives one of the best definitions I’ve found of missional living: “In Christianity, missional living takes place when the believer adopts the posture, thinking, behaviors and practices of a missionary in order to engage others with the gospel message.” Unfortunately, the word “missional” has become such a misused and misunderstood buzzword in the last decade. But, at its core, the term emphasizes the truth that ALL Christians should be involved in the Great Commission of Jesus Christ, not only a select group of “professional” missionaries.

Scripture is clear that all Christians are missionaries. Here’s why:

Salvation is a call to be a missionary. The following statement can’t biblically exist in the minds of Christians: “God has called me to salvation but not to missions.” The call to a relationship with the king is also a call to tell the world about this same king! And, this should make us extremely joyful. After all, thank God that there is more to being a Christian than getting saved, sitting on our blessed assurances on padded pews, going to a bunch of potluck dinners, waiting on the Rapture Bus to swoop down and pick us all up to the good ol’ by-and-by.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing: it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has
passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, something; we're also called TO something!

Yes, we're saved from sin, hell, God's wrath and the kingdom of darkness; but we're also called to the kingdom of God, community, the church and the mission of God! Missions is one of the reasons we were adopted into the family of God. As believers, we cannot be selfish with the gospel. We must share it with the world, which includes our schools, jobs, families, neighborhoods and the nations. How and where we are missionaries will be revealed by the Spirit of God, but the fact that we are missionaries has been declared once and for all in God's Word. It's now our purpose, passion and point of living to tell the world about Jesus.

Missions carry with them a message. God told the prophet Isaiah, Go and say, (Isaiah 6:9). The apostle Paul told the Corinthians, … entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:19b – 20). Therefore, any kind of missions that doesn't have a verbal gospel proclamation is most likely not the missio dei—mission of God—but rather temporary service projects. There is nothing wrong with painting fences, planting gardens or handing out sandwiches. However, if there is no message tied to it, let's not call it missions. Those efforts are no different than what many other clubs, organizations or philanthropists do.

True, biblical missions uses avenues like social justice, mercy ministries and service, work to ultimately point people to the savior named Jesus. It's not very loving to let someone live with physical hunger when we have it within our means to feed him; however, it's also not loving to let someone live with spiritual hunger when we have within our mouths the message of life.

Hell is just as hungry for the souls of those with full stomachs as it is for those with empty stomachs. Here is what true care for someone looks like: we give a sandwich out of love while also telling them about the Bread of Life out of love.

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news! (Romans 10:14-15)

The church reformer Martin Luther said, “It wouldn’t matter if Jesus died a thousand times if no one heard about it.” This is a haunting reality that should motivate us all to realize and remember that missions is not one of the many ministries of the local church, nor is it a passion and calling of some. The mission of God is the very reason the church exists! If you’re a Christian, you’re a missionary. So, go and tell the world about your king.

This article originally appeared on alreadyam.com

so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:17-21)

The beautiful truth that comes from these Scriptures is the teaching that we're not just called FROM

AS BELIEVERS, WE CANNOT BE SELFISH WITH THE GOSPEL. WE MUST SHARE IT WITH THE WORLD, WHICH INCLUDES OUR SCHOOLS, JOBS, FAMILIES, NEIGHBORHOODS AND THE NATIONS.
ENLARGE THE ORGANIZATION

BY KENNETH PRIEST
SBTC Director of Convention Strategies
As a pastor begins to think about enlarging the organization, it once again comes around to the issue of need. A portion of your role as the senior leader is to strategize on the "what’s next" list. A pastor must continually look to what is going to be happening next in the church in order to address it. As an example, if the church is going to host a fall festival and has a strong follow-up process to its festival, it can expect some additional families to begin attending the church. The pastor must look to the preschool and children’s area to ensure they are prepared for what may come. Are the rooms ready? Are there enough volunteers equipped? These are just two of the initial questions. Whatever the event or program, it will drive an outcome when implemented correctly, therefore the church must be prepared.

Why start new groups? Bottom line is to reach new people for Christ. Even in a declining church, starting a new group is the best way to reach new people.

So how does one enlarge the organization? First, a church must decide what Bible study model is needed to be used in its respective context; on-campus Sunday morning, on-campus small groups, off-campus small groups or a hybrid.

**Definitions:**

**On-campus Sunday morning:** traditionally referred to as a Sunday school model or Bible Fellowship model. This decision typically uses age-graded or life-stage Bible study classes which meet around the worship hour of the church. A challenge for this model is not enough time for biblical community.

**On-campus small groups:** this model is a small group model which still uses the church campus. Typically, this model would meet at a different time from the primary worship time, utilizing age-graded and life-stage classes. A challenge for this model is getting people back on campus an additional time during the week.

**Off-campus small groups:** this model typically has the groups meetings when it is most convenient for the persons engaged in that particular group. These groups may be setup by
Deciding on your target audience will help you determine which model is best for your church.

The leaders who are focusing on that group, maximizes your resources, plus much more.

The best way to determine your target is to see what needs you have in your church. Some of this work should have been done during your look into the possibilities for your church.

Often in revitalization work, the missing generations are under the age of 50. Therefore we encourage pastors to target young adults, typically young couples, but not to the extent you are neglecting the other generations. When we discuss target, this is not so much a singular bullseye of a group, the church should reflect its community context. With that understanding, you can focus on beginning to reach those who had previously drifted away from the church. Start a weekday marriage enrichment class for young couples. This new group is then specifically geared to reaching a missing group from the church. We also do not push them to start coming on Sundays immediately. They were not there before, so we want to slowly walk them into the fellowship on Sunday. Once we have the relationship through our weekday study, we then have the right to come back and invite them to Sunday services.

This brief time is just the beginning of enlarging the organization. You can find a copy of “Be a Catalyst: Start New Groups” on the State Sunday School Director’s website sundayschooldirector.com. This resource was compiled by a group of the state convention Sunday School leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention.

The encouragement of this article is to be strategic, be intentional and be prepared to meet the needs of the community by reaching the lost generations around your church.
The numbers are not good. In fact, the numbers are really scary. We see the percentage of churches that are plateaued and declining remain over 70 percent both in Texas and nationally. In addition to that, our baptism numbers continue to decline year after year. Often times we are befuddled as to why we can’t reach them. Do we need more exciting worship? Are we short of ideas and activities? Is our pastor not dynamic enough? You can add a host of questions and reasons here. Some of them have weight and merit, but I contend that they are not enough. We are in dire need of something more than the next series or even new leadership. We need a different plan.
What if one of the components, or maybe even the greatest key, to turn this around is disciple-making? What if the struggles we are seeing stem from a lack of true disciples in the church? Would that change the importance of the conversation when it comes to making fully replicating followers of Christ? Would that make us rethink what we are doing? Would that make us focus on the lives of people more and their spiritual journey?

We have adopted the phrase, “disciples make disciples.” This is not an aspirational goal, but a key focus. It is simple and yet incredibly difficult. It is basic to the core of who we are as Christians and yet it is profound in the deepest of ways. True disciples make other disciples. For this to make any sense and to help move this conversation forward, we must define what a disciple is and does. To be honest, most leaders that I have engaged with do a great job of understanding a component of what a disciple is and does. They often push hard and work to help their people embrace a particular or a few particular aspects of a disciple. The problem is that most of the time they have not developed a comprehensive picture of a disciple. A major portion of the leaders I interact with in churches have not been personally discipled and thus struggle to define, or for that matter replicate, that in the lives of others. When leadership has not clearly defined or really may not even know what a replicating disciple looks like, the struggle to be effective for the gospel becomes an ever-increasing obstacle. In truth, we are lost to engage the morally runaway culture if we don’t know how disciples live and make other disciples.

**DISCIPLESHIP REDEFINED**
When we talk about making true Disciples, we are looking at an approach that focuses on developing disciples who can make other disciples. This is not just about imparting knowledge or information; it is about helping others grow in their faith and become active participants in their own spiritual journeys. The emphasis is on creating a community of believers who support and encourage one another in their personal growth and spiritual development. This approach requires a deep commitment from both the leaders and the followers, who must work together to create an environment that fosters discipleship and personal growth. By defining what a disciple is and does, we can create a more effective and sustainable approach to church revitalization and renewal.
disciples, we have to clearly define what a disciple is and does. Many have written extensively on this and will define it far more eloquently that I can in this article. We use the following definition as a place to begin the conversation:

A disciple is a fully committed follower of Christ that embraces the message of Jesus through spiritual growth and maturity, the mission of Jesus through penetrating lostness (missions and evangelism), and the method of Jesus through life-on-life spiritual multiplication.

We use the phrase, “fully committed follower of Christ” intentionally. Disciple-making begins with people committing their hearts and lives to Christ. Many times churches work to program the ministries of the church before focusing on the hearts of the people. If you want to make replicating disciples, you must begin by changing and engaging the hearts of the people. They have to be on mission, not just attending.

In addition to that, our definition includes missions, evangelism and training as a part of disciple-making. We are taking about more than just teaching someone about God. This includes sharing, reaching, living and replicating in the lives of others

with the gospel. Our struggle is that we have separated these ideas in the church and people choose the one(s) they prefer. Many discipleship people are not really evangelists and many evangelists don’t know how to make disciples. If we want to change the culture of the church, we have to teach people to live as replicating, evangelizing disciple-makers. True disciples reach people, multiply their faith and live on mission, and that is what we want to see all throughout the church.

**REVITALIZATION DEMANDS DISCIPLE-MAKING**

The key to seeing things change rallies around the fact that we have to refocus our efforts on the most important things, making disciples who make disciples. In the world of revitalization, we must stop trying to keep moving forward as though everything is going well when it is not. We need to see the reality that many churches are plateaued and declining, from there we need to reset our vision to focus on true disciple-making multiplication.

This requires the pastor to develop life-replicating disciples as a leader. Practically, this may involve him meeting with his staff, deacons, or a few key leaders every week, then walking with them to live as disciples and challenging them to replicate their lives in the lives of others. There is no quick fix. It requires investing and building a leadership team that makes disciples. It’s about multiplication not addition. This conversation is simply a drop in the bucket of the needs we have to turn things around, but every movement begins with a single step.

We are called to live out and pass on our faith, just like the early disciples. We are called to pass on our faith in such a way that it continues to grow. This is our task.

**Overwhelming, isn't it?**

RHYTHMS is a new resource developed by the SBTC with a goal to provide an introductory disciple-making tool for churches and leaders in Texas and beyond.

*For your copy visit sbtexas.com/rhythms*
“Good is the enemy of great” is the first sentence of Jim Collins’ business best seller, *Good to Great*. Collins goes on to say, “and that is one of the reasons that we have so little that becomes great. We don’t have great schools, principally because we have good schools. We don’t have great government, principally because we have good government. Few people attain great lives, precisely because it is easy to settle for a good life. The vast majority of companies never become great precisely because they become quite good—and that is their main problem.”

By Jim Baker | Sacred Structures

The same can be said for the church. Each year we are faced with more opportunities and ideas than we have time or resources, and without a clear vetting process we can easily settle for less than the best. Church members come to us with their passions they want adopted. Denominational agencies present programs and offerings for us to support. Church staff return from the latest conference with new ministry ideas they want to implement.

With a constant flow of compelling ideas, requests and opportunities for kingdom impact confronting our staff, leadership, personnel and finance committees, how then can we distinguish the good from the best? We believe staff and committees running requests and recommendations through the following vetting filters increases the likelihood of broad agreement and wise decisions.
## 12 Vetting Criteria for Vision, Strategy and Ministry Initiatives

1. **God’s Will** - Evidenced by broad based staff and lay leader prayerful discernment, agreement, support, affirmation: Scale of 1-10

2. **Alignment** - Degree to which it supports the church’s mission, vision, strategic objectives and goals: Scale of 1-10

3. **Potential Impact** - Degree of impact on the church’s mission, vision, strategic objectives and goals: High/Medium/Low

4. **Probability of Success** - Likelihood of the initiative being received well, and implemented successfully and timely: High/Medium/Low

5. **Cost/Benefit** - Value, affordability, demand on the church’s financial, physical and human resources: High/Medium/Low

6. **Risk/Reward** - Degree of risk versus potential reward (high risk/low reward: high risk/high reward; low risk/high reward; low risk/low reward)

7. **Core Competency** - Do we currently have the staff and lay competency to successfully implement this initiative? If not, how will we gain the necessary competency? Who are those advocates willing to lead the initiative?

8. **Trade Offs** - If we do this, what will we not be able to do or have to stop doing? What will happen if we don’t do it?

9. **Precedent** - Do we have a history or track record with this initiative that suggests we should continue to expand and maximize it?

10. **Problem Avoidance/Problem Solving** - What potential problems could occur if this initiative is implemented? What are the anticipated obstacles? How will we overcome them?

11. **Goals and Metrics** - What are the specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timely goals of the initiative? What are the key metrics that indicate success?

12. **Communication** - What are the channels for communicating the plans and outcomes?

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## 12 Vetting Criteria for Personnel Initiatives

In addition to the vetting criteria to the left, before proceeding with proposing a new church staff position, answer the following questions:

1. **Need** - We need a person who can meet this need...Why? How is this need currently being addressed?

2. **Growth** - How will this position help grow the mission, vision and ministry of our church?

3. **Strategic** - What strategic initiatives of the church will this position move forward? What specific global church objective or goal will this position help advance?

4. **Gaps** - If this person were not hired, what would not get done or accomplished? What would be the negative impact?

5. **Benefits** - What measurable results do we want to achieve from this position? What benefits will the church receive?

6. **Volunteers** - Can this need be met by a volunteer(s)? If not, why not?

7. **Part Time** - Can this need be met by a contract or part-time employee? If not, why not? If so, what are the projected costs?

8. **Outsourcing** - Can this need be met by outsourcing? If not, why not? If so, what are the projected costs?

9. **Other Staff** - Can this need be met by adding it to the job description of a current position? If not, why not? If so, how would this additional responsibility impact their other responsibilities?

10. **Training** - Can a current staff or volunteer be trained to fill this role? If not, why not? If so, how can this training be achieved?

11. **Structure** - If approved, where on the staff organization chart will the position fit? Supervisor, number of direct reports? Classification? Compensation? Funding source?

12. **Priority** - Where does this staff position fit in hiring priority, relative to existing staffing requests in the multi-year staffing model? What is the ideal timing of this hire?
BAKER’S DOZEN
DECISION-MAKING APPROACHES

BY JIM BAKER | SACRED STRUCTURES
hange leaders are people who see opportunities where others don’t. They have the courage to take great risks and the ability to make wise decisions.

Frequently they aren’t even aware of the decision-making process they are using when determining a change initiative, but intuitively run change related decisions through multiple filters.

**Thirteen Decision-Making Approaches When Considering Change**

Developing the ability to make wise decisions is foundational to effectively leading change. The list below contains 13 common lenses for viewing decisions. Use them to look at change-related decisions from multiple angles and to discover your preferred decision-making approaches.

1. **SPIRITUAL:** What indications are there that the change is God’s will?
2. **ALIGNMENT:** Does the change line up with the mission and vision of the church?
3. **PRIORITIES:** Does the change support the church’s objectives and goals?
4. **PRINCIPLES:** Is the change consistent with the church’s values and doctrine?
5. **PERSPECTIVE:** What do key advisors think about the change?
6. **STAFF:** What do other staff or team members think about the change?
7. **INTUITIVE:** What is your gut saying?
8. **RATIONAL:** What are the pros and cons?
9. **RISK/REWARD:** What are the risks with this change? What are the potential pay-offs? Can you live with the worst case scenario?
10. **COST:** What are the costs in dollars, time and resources? What are the costs if you don’t make the change?
11. **CAPACITY:** Is there sufficient time and motivation to see the change through?
12. **COMPETENCY:** Is there adequate knowledge, skills and habits to implement the change?
13. **RELATIONAL:** Who will be impacted most by this change? Who will benefit, who will be hurt?

**Other Questions To Consider**

- Which approaches make the most difference for you?
- What would a wise decision look like?
- What other information do you need to know to make a great decision?
- What will you stop doing to make room for this change?
- What other decision making approaches would you add to the list?

*One does not discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore.*

—ANDRE GIDE
REVITALIZATION + TECHNOLOGY
Revitalizing a church is not a simple task that can be accomplished overnight. It is a process that takes earnest prayer, intentional evangelism coupled with discipleship and a focused priority on God’s Word. With this foundation set, resources can be used alongside it in order to enhance the work of revitalization. We live in a world that is dominated by technology, whether it is the newest smart phone, tablet, virtual reality or social media platform. This constantly advancing technology comes with its risks, but also with its many benefits for personal and ministry use. In a revitalization work, it is highly important for extra resources to be cost-effective, if not free. This is why the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention has worked to provide resources by utilizing the current trends in technology for churches to use. I would like to share with you just a few of these resources that can be utilized for your work in revitalizing your church starting with the resources provided by the SBTC and then looking at a few additional technological tools.

**OTHER TOOLS FOR REVITALIZATION**

When a church is in the process of revitalization, it is important to be great stewards with the limited funds that are available.

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**ONLINE TRAINING**

**SBTEXAS.COM/ONLINE**

A couple years ago we developed a site to house video trainings, sermons, and webinars. The site has now grown and has almost 600 videos to help our churches in many different areas of ministry. This site can be utilized by those on staff and those in the congregation. For a church going through revitalization, this content can help fill the gap caused by lack of staff and train leaders in the comfort of their own home or at church.

There is a specific section for churches going through revitalization with content geared to address the issues they are facing. If your church is going through the revitalization process with the SBTC, preaching and teaching points are provided to work in conjunction with the sermon-based small group approach method that we use. Each session provides insight for the pastors and Sunday school/small group leaders as they approach the text.

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**THE CHURCH REVITALIZATION APP**

**GET.THEAPP.CO/9655**

Apps for phones and tablets have become even more accessible for churches and ministers to use. The Church Revitalization app provides resources for you in the palm of your hand. Articles, blogs, short videos and a new podcast on revitalization are all housed in this one app. This allows for content on revitalization to be accessed anywhere, so long as your device has an internet connection. New content is added periodically in order to stay up-to-date with changes and current trends in revitalization. This app is available for Android, Apple and Windows phones.

The newly launched Church Revitalization podcast features different guests answering questions on revitalization and discussing revitalization as it pertains to specific areas. These guests provide insight for unique areas of revitalization and can be downloaded so that you can listen at your own convenience. Look for podcasts with guests such as Ken Hemphill and Ronnie Floyd. This podcast is available directly within the Church Revitalization app or simply search “Church Revitalization” in iTunes.

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**PASTOR DEVELOPMENT SITE**

**CHURCH-REVITALIZATION.COM**

Revitalizing a church is a challenging task that pastors do not have to face alone. Our pastor development site provides courses and resources for the pastor who is working through revitalization in his church. Reports and responses to questions from the course pertaining to the church are sent to a mentor that can help guide the pastor during the revitalization process. This allows for what can be a lonely experience for a pastor to be a time that filled with honesty, encouragement and support. Currently there are three courses based on the books *Breaking the Missional Code*, *Bonsai Theory of Church Growth* and *Total Church Life* which address different aspects of the process that are important to revitalization.
IN TODAY’S CULTURE IT IS IMPORTANT FOR A CHURCH TO HAVE AN ONLINE PRESENCE IN THE FORM OF SOCIAL MEDIA OR A WEBSITE.

Many things seem unattainable for a church that is not “tech-savvy” and has a small budget. However, there are many tools out there at little to no cost and can still be effective in enhancing the work of the church.

In today’s culture it is important for a church to have an online presence in the form of social media or a website. When someone searches “church” or “Baptist church” online, what do they find? If you do not show up, they will likely visit a different church.

For a church, Facebook pages are currently a great way to have a free online presence. It is necessary to have a personal profile in order to create a Facebook Page. With the ability to post as you would on a personal account, but also display contact information, an address and other information a church can interact with members and non-members alike. It is important to be consistent in posting. Whether it is Scripture, an announcement for an upcoming event or just a word of encouragement, when people find your page, non-members will want to see that things have been happening in the life of the church even if it just within a Facebook post.

For an initial church website, Weebly (weebly.com) or Wordpress (wordpress.com) are good options in order to create a free online presence alongside social media. Weebly does offer paid packages that are still cost effective if the additional tools are necessary for your church. It is important to include your church’s location, contact information and service times in whatever format you choose for your online presence.

For images on social media posts, apps such as Over or Adobe’s Spark Post are must haves. These apps can cost a few dollars, but are worth the small price to be able to create images with scripture, quotes or announcements for your church. A small addition such as this can really enhance a social media post or even a banner on a website. These apps can be found on your phone or tablet’s app store.

Technology is ever-changing and progressing, but churches can utilize the tools to their advantage so long as they enhance the work of the church and do not distract from the gospel message. The foundation of prayer, evangelism, discipleship and a priority on God’s Word must be at the center of what the church is doing, only to be supported by whatever the latest technological trend may be.

How to create a page:
facebook.com/help/104002523024878
SBTC APPS

FREE DOWNLOADS

Search “SBTC” to find these resources

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## Church Revitalization
Revitalization training videos, event details & resources

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## SBTC
SBTC events calendar, event streaming, archived sessions, TEXAN Magazine, TEXAN Online, staff directory

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## 1Cross
Share the gospel in multiple languages (3-minute video for each language). Also contains resources for sharing your faith.

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## iLEAD
Providing educational resources and training. Includes webinars, leadership conversations, event videos, tips & event calendar

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## The Evangelism App
Evangelism tools, event details & resources

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## @home Family Ministry
Helping churches and families minister @ home. Weekly marriage podcast + family devotionals, age-graded life applications, along with other resources and tools.

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## Disaster Relief (DR)
Calendar of DR trainings, updates from disaster relief, video testimonials/updates

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## Advance Now
Designed to equip others to advance the kingdom of God. Contains podcasts, articles, videos and news updates.

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## Student Ministry
Events calendar, blog, artist/speaker info from events

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sbtexas.com/apps
am a runner.

At least, I like to think of myself as a runner. Over the years as I have immersed myself into the running culture that I never knew existed, I have learned new techniques, how to position my body in order to run faster, what to look for in shoes and apparel, and many other things that help me maximize my running abilities. One can be inundated with all the new products, races, and medals that the running world offers. However, having the right shoes, GPS watches, clothing and books do not make you a runner — running does!

As we look across the landscape of churches in America, many have all the right accessories to be evangelistic churches. They have great preachers, incredible worship, state-of-the-art facilities, and all the things they could ever need in order to attract families to the church. Yet they are not winning people to Jesus and their baptisms are at an all-time low. How can this be? I believe the answer lies within the same concept of running. We can have all we need to be effective evangelistic churches, but that doesn’t make you an evangelistic church— doing evangelism does!

As I observe churches across Texas that year after year are seeing many people saved and baptized, I have come to the conclusion that there are five key components or habits in the life of a church that leads it to evangelistic effectiveness. I pray these will assist your church in reaching more people for Jesus than ever before.

1) THE PASTOR LEADS THE CHARGE

This is without a doubt the most important aspect of a church becoming highly effective in their evangelism efforts. The pastor must be the one who is blowing the trumpet of intentional evangelism. It is said that the church will take on the personality of the pastor. If this is true, an evangelistic pastor will lead to an evangelistic church. We need pastors to stand up and lead the charge by modeling evangelism and clearly communicating the commands to do
evangelism in the Scriptures. If the pastor will lead the way, the church will follow!

2) THE CHURCH KNOWS ITS COMMUNITY

It cannot be emphasized enough that a church that knows its community the best will have a better chance of reaching its community for Jesus. Churches that have an understanding of the layout of its community and who is in its community can then develop strategies to engage them with the gospel of Christ. When a church knows its community it can begin looking at its community through the lenses of the Great Commission and lead its people to be missionaries in the city. At some point, God planted your church in your community to know and love the people in which he planted you. As you know them, you can build the bridges to share the good news of Jesus Christ with them.

3) THE PEOPLE ARE EQUIPPED

One of the greatest hindrances to churches becoming highly evangelistic is the assumption that they know how to share their faith. We must never assume that any believer knows how to clearly articulate the gospel. A common belief is that 95 percent of Christ-followers never share Jesus with anyone. I would submit this would likely be the result due to the lack of equipping believers on how to share the gospel. Churches that are highly evangelistic are very intentional in equipping their people to share Jesus. There are many different tools that are available to churches to equip their people. However, a tool is not effective if left in the tool box. Churches that equip their people to share the gospel are equipping their people to reach their community.

WE CAN HAVE ALL WE NEED TO BE EFFECTIVE EVANGELISTIC CHURCHES, BUT THAT DOESN’T MAKE YOU AN EVANGELISTIC CHURCH—DOING EVANGELISM DOES!

4) THE CHURCH HAS A DESIRE TO WIN ITS COMMUNITY TO JESUS

In order for a church to reach its community for Christ, it must desire to win its community to Christ. In many churches today, the mentality is so inwardly focused that they do not know what to do to reach their communities. If we are going to see floodgates of revival open across our cities and communities, it must begin with a desire to see our friends and neighbors saved. The apostle Paul tells us of his heart in Romans 10:1 when he declares, “Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.” Paul clearly communicates that his heart desires for his people to be saved. As churches, our heart must beat for the lost to come to Jesus! The absence of our desire for people to know Jesus is the presence of our desire for them to go to hell. When churches develop a heart and desire for their communities to know Jesus, you will begin to see many communities transformed by the power of Christ!

5) EVANGELISM IS CONSISTENTLY HIGHLIGHTED BEFORE THE CHURCH

One of the greatest things a pastor can do for his church is to consistently highlight how God is using the church to reach people with the gospel. Oftentimes we show videos of missionaries in a far-away land doing an exceptional work for the Lord. However, if you want a church to get fired up about the gospel, have people in the church highlight for the church the different experiences of sharing the gospel that week. I am convinced that there is nothing that will change the culture of a church like evangelism will. When people in the church constantly hear stories of the gospel being shared and people coming to Jesus, it will begin to sink in their minds and hearts that they, too, can be used greatly by God. A church that is excited about evangelism is a church that spends a lot of time highlighting evangelism.

So where is your church with evangelism? Do you have all the accessories needed but can’t seem to gain traction? I encourage you to consider these five habits that churches utilize and begin seeing how God will use them. When one begins running, he doesn’t immediately go out and run a marathon. Instead, he begins running one step at a time. In order to get to the marathon, you have to do just that – start running. The same can be said about evangelism. In order to reach your community for Jesus, begin by reaching one!
Dismounting the pulpit, you would really be shocked if the people did not hoist you on their shoulders and carry you out hailing you as the greatest preacher in the world. In fact you are a little surprised that they did not stand and shout like a political rally, right in the middle of the sermon. (The humble tweet that follows: “God was really good today,” belies the fact that you killed it. Killed. It.)

In my experience, these times are rare. They happen, but not often. Rarely is a sermon, from start to finish, exactly what we want it to be. So, the question is, “How are we to evaluate our own preaching?”

For those with a commitment to the perfection and sufficiency of Scripture, we say one word: faithfulness. We do not invent messages; we proclaim truth. So we measure our effectiveness by how faithful we are to the text. In fact, this is the only reason I preach. We mount the pulpit free from any obligation to express our feeling on anything – much less eternal matters. Those things are settled. We are in the delivery of the message not its invention.

However, this being true, why is it that so many times my best attempt at faithfulness to Scripture falls flat. I really did try to say what the Scripture said, the way the Scripture said it, but it just did not work. I am not suggesting there is more than faithfulness; I am suggesting that we who are faithful must constantly reexamine what we mean by that.
If by “faithful” we mean simply getting the text correct, then we have failed. If you’re passionate about preaching that last sentence may seem disconcerting, so let me clarify. We know that there is a glut of preaching today that has precious little to do with a text of Scripture. This breaks our hearts. Scripture alone is enough! So sometimes, in reaction to this, we swim against the tide of shallow, light, entertaining preaching and counter it with preaching that is boring, mundane, passionless and disengaging. Some of us who love Scripture the most are profoundly boring. Just to be clear I am not saying this as a reformer, but a penitent. This is my biggest homiletic challenge. I want to be so clear about what the text says that often I can be dry. People are not engaged. Of course when I realize this, I justify my ineffective preaching with an internal monologue that says, “Well, at least I got the text right. Those others guys, sure they were engaging, but they never dealt with the text.”

The entertaining preacher excuses his sin because he made people laugh. The boring preacher excuses his sin because he made people yawn. Neither one has really preached. And I know, because I am both.

So how are we to understand this task?

Well, first let’s crush the mental metaphor of “balance.” This metaphor gives the idea that we can be too exegetical, too deep, or too textual, or too engaging, or too funny—we just need a little of all of it. But that’s unhelpful. Can we really be too faithful to Scripture? Maybe a better metaphor than striving for balance is embracing the tension. There is a tension in all of us—it pulls us to engage the text while engaging people. This tension does not need to be suppressed, it needs to be embraced. We are called to go deeply in the text, and then bring the text to the people. If our exegesis is shallow we have nothing to give people on Sunday. If I stay too long in the study, I go so deep I never surface and give people exegetical nuances that do not help them. There is the tension. After I sink in order to find the meaning of a text, when do I surface? In other words, how long do I spend on what the text means, and how long do I spend on how to say what it means.

Now we have backed in a helpful metaphor. Think of a deep sea diver. The treasure that he wants is not buoyant. It's not even at 25 ft. If he wants the real treasure he must sink. However, if he stays in the depths too long, he will not have the oxygen needed to bring the treasure to the surface. After all, even when he does he has to polish it off if people are going to see the original beauty of the treasure. If he wants to access the treasure, bring it to the surface, and have people appreciate the treasure the way it was appreciated before it sank, then he must sink, surface and shine. He must spend time on what the text means, what he is to say about it, and how he is to say it.

However, think about this one truism: Scripture is not boring. It would be hard to argue with this. Therefore, if I preach a boring sermon, then that was not in the text. I brought that.

A light, trivial, man-centered sermon is a mix of God’s Word and man’s hubris. But isn’t there as much hubris in academic boredom as there is in folksy slapstick? Let’s be honest. We can’t excuse boring sermons because we parsed our verbs correctly, any more than we can excuse light fluffy sermons because we entertained.
A plumb line is a simple but accurate tool used for determining whether or not something is perfectly vertical or upright. Used since ancient times, a plumb line consists of a line and weight of some sort, usually a stone or piece of lead.

References to the use of a plumb line in the Holy Scriptures are usually that of the Lord’s plumb line, how righteously people stand according to his Word.

In Amos 7:8, The Lord asked Amos, “What do you see, Amos?” He replied, “A plumb line.” Then the Lord said, “I am setting a plumb line among My people Israel.”

**PLUMB LINES FOR DECISIONS**

The plumb line can be a useful metaphor in church decision making. With a myriad of opportunities for ministry how do you determine what to say “yes” to and what to say “no” to?

Mission and ministry plumb lines can function much like a carpenter’s or mason’s plumb line. They make sure your ministries, programs and decisions line up with your mission, vision, values and priorities. Ministry plumb lines identify and objectify misalignment by reflecting the truths and values you embrace and the behaviors you expect.

In a sense they are your organizational “flags on the hill” or “maxims” – a list of principles that describe clearly and concisely what you believe, value and expect staff and leadership to think through when considering ministry and resource allocation decisions.

They communicate how you want opportunities processed and let everyone know what kind of things you will do and won’t do.

Mission and ministry plumb lines then can be an effective tool for communicating “the way we operate around here.”
PLUMB LINES AS GUIDING PRECEPTS - TURNING VALUES INTO BEHAVIORS

But to move from a piece of paper or a plaque on the wall to a vital part of the church culture, you must transform these statements about what you believe and value into guiding precepts.

Guiding precepts both define what you believe and value and provide an example of the types of actions the church believes supports that value.

We recommend using the following format for guiding precepts: “We believe….(Value). Therefore, we will….. (Behavior).” Below are examples to stimulate your own thinking about your church’s guiding precepts.

MISSIONS – WE BELIEVE:

1. No one comes to the Father except through Jesus. Therefore, because everyone needs Jesus, we will give top priority to ministries and initiatives that connect people to Jesus Christ (through evangelism, acts of compassion/mercy, etc.) rather than those that focus solely on meeting physical needs.
2. The church is God’s plan “A” for building his kingdom. Therefore, we will give top priority to starting new congregations/churches and equipping and building up existing churches.
3. Partnerships are catalysts for kingdom growth. Therefore, we will prioritize establishment of kingdom partnerships with groups and organizations of like mind and mission.
4. People most frequently discover our church through others and through our website and social media. Therefore, we will give priority to (1) equipping our members to share about their faith and their church, and (2) developing and maintaining a dynamic web and social media presence.

WORSHIP – WE BELIEVE:

1. Worship is essential to loving God and is the front door to the church. Therefore, we will give top priority to resourcing God-honoring, believer-targeted and seeker-sensitive worship services and venues.
2. Prayer is the key to spiritual awakening and kingdom growth. Therefore, we will prioritize prayer that focuses on salvation for the lost and spiritual renewal of the saved.

WORSHIP – WE BELIEVE:

1. The goal of discipleship is a personal and intentional spiritual growth plan leading to a Christ-centered life. Therefore, we will give top priority to resourcing and facilitating involvement in our church wide discipleship strategy.
2. The home is the center for faith training. Therefore, we will give top priority to resourcing home and church partnership strategies.

SERVICE – WE BELIEVE:

1. God calls every believer for kingdom service. Therefore, we will give top priority to (1) helping believers discover how God has uniquely gifted, experienced and impassioned them for a kingdom calling, and (2) facilitating their obedience to that calling.

STEWARDSHIP – WE BELIEVE:

1. God owns it all. Therefore, we will teach that the tithe is only the beginning point in Christian stewardship.
2. The church is God’s biblical plan for making disciples. Therefore, we will encourage members to give their time, talent and treasure to the church.

TRAINING – WE BELIEVE:

1. Ministry training and replication is essential to developing a pipeline of leaders, and happens best in a church-based environment. Therefore, we will give top priority to resourcing church-based on-the-job training apprenticeship, internship and residency initiatives.

RESOURCES – WE BELIEVE:

1. Our campus is designed to be a base for equipping and sending people to be on mission for God, and a tool for reaching our world for Christ. Therefore, we will give priority to campus uses that equip and deploy believers and those that have an intentional strategy for connecting people to Jesus Christ.
2. Communicating our mission, vision, objectives, and priorities in clear and effective ways is essential to gaining support for doing the work of the church. Therefore, we will follow a communication strategy that recognizes the priorities of our goals and reduces or eliminates isolated or silo-oriented messages.
The Strategic Growth Forum gathers key leaders in church-based ministries to assist pastors and church leaders with issues confronting the church today.

The format is designed with keynote addresses in the morning and individualized consultations in the afternoon and evening. The consultations are personalized for each churches specific growth challenges, addressing what you believe is most important for your context.

*Church Revitalization Pastors engaged with the SBTC are complimentary for this event

Thanks again for the great forum in North Richland Hills. I’ve been in ministry for 42 years and can honestly say that was the best conference I’ve attended. All things were inspirational and helpful.

Jackie Stanfield
First Baptist Church of Linden

COST
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$40 maximum per church*

Jim Richards
SBTC Executive Director

Jim Baker
Sacred Structures

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Minister of Spiritual Development, Prestonwood Baptist Church

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SBTC Office, Grapevine

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