

Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 14

25 Turnaround Strategies for Small-Membership Congregations

Why are we gifting you this volume? Because the mission statement of our primary publication—*The Parish Paper: New Ideas for Active Congregations*—is to help the largest possible number of congregations achieve maximum effectiveness in their various ministries. *The Parish Paper* is a monthly newsletter whose subscribers receive copyright permission to distribute to their constituents—more than two million readers in 28 denominations. Go to www.TheParishPaper.com for subscription information.

Purpose of this Volume: Provides in-depth answers to questions that readers of *The Parish Paper* ask regarding principles and procedures that help congregations whose worship attendances average fewer than 100 to move toward their full potential for health and effectiveness. (The challenges of midsize congregations—100 to 300 in average worship attendance—differ greatly from small-church challenges.)

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How to Use this Resource

Information on paper does not equal transformation in congregations. Knowing does not equal doing. Positive change, either in a church or an individual, more often comes by interactions with other respected persons than by solitary study.

Therefore, this resource provides a long-term study-discussion—though which the congregation can experience itself into new insights, and action-directions.

Step #1: The congregation's governing board appoints a special task force to act on its behalf, comprised of six respected laypersons and the pastor. (Some churches call this group the Parish Enrichment Planning Team, or PEP Team.) A good selection formula for this special task force: two people above age forty, two people under age forty, two adults who became members within the last three years, and the pastor.

Warning: No matter how small the number of active leaders in your congregation, do NOT hand this material to any presently-existing group in your congregation, such as the governing board or a committee. Experience indicates that this *always* short-circuits the opportunity for positive results!

Do not succumb to the temptation to think your church is an exception to this rule! Better not to use the process at all than to block its effectiveness, then say, "We tried that!" when you didn't actually use it.

Avoid the temptation to appoint a husband and wife to the PEP Team. By reducing the number of viewpoints, you reduce the creativity.

Avoid the temptation to make the PEP Team larger than six people plus the pastor. Research indicates that any kind of group, regardless of the excellence of its individuals, reduces the likelihood of thinking outside the box of recent history, reduces its insight-generating ability, reduces its creativity, and reduces its planning ability when it moves beyond five-to-seven members.

Avoid the temptation to think the PEP Team, by itself, should personally DO all of the ideas it decides to recommend to the governing board, committees, or other congregational leadership groups. The PEP Team functions as a task force appointed by the governing board to guide the implementation, testing, and refining process.

Step #2: The Parish Enrichment Team (PEP Team) begins its ministry with six, one-hour discussions of this study/discussion/planning resource during six consecutive weeks. Prior to the first session, create three-hole notebooks and distribute them to PEP Team member. Ask Team members to commit themselves to reading the material in preparation for the six discussions.

Step #3: The PEP Team, across a three-year period, leads the congregation's committees, ministries, and governing board in systematically implementing, refining, and perfecting the ideas and methods selected during the six-week discussion sessions.

Biblical Basis for this Study/Discussion/Planning Process: "Where there is no vision, the people perish. . . . (Proverbs 29:18, KJV)." "Without counsel plans go wrong, but with many advisers they succeed (Proverbs 15:22)." "The ear of the wise seeks knowledge (Proverbs 18:15)." "Behold, I make all things new (Revelation 21:5)."

Study/Discussion/Planning Session #1

PEP Team Member: Prepare for your PEP Team's discussion session by making notes in the margins, especially with regard to questions such as the following.

1. Do you recall instances where this paragraph or section was true in your personal experience and/or in a congregation?
2. What would you like to add or subtract from this paragraph or section?
3. In what ways does the idea in this section or paragraph seem true of our congregation?
4. What suggested methods from this section or paragraph should we consider using in our congregation?

PEP Team Discussion Leader: As you move through this discussion session, ask PEP Team members to take turns sharing their answers to the above questions.

I. The small-church paradox:

- A. Approximately 175,000 of America's 350,000 churches average fewer than 100 in worship, making small congregations the most common size church in America. (People increasingly attend mega-churches that average more than 1,000 in worship, but only about 1 percent to 2 percent of congregations fall into that size category.)
- B. Many Americans say that they prefer to attend a small church.
- C. Yet research indicates that 85 percent of small churches (fewer than 100 in average attendance) are either smaller than they were five years ago or are on a size-plateau that prevents them from achieving many of their hopes and dreams.
- D. The implication: at least 150,000 of God's retail outlets are under-performing.

II. How can small churches move toward their full potential for mission and ministry effectiveness?

- A. Leaders must understand the unique nature of small-membership churches. Without that understanding, well-meaning, enthusiastic governing boards, committees, and ministry teams try to use strategies and programs that work well in large or midsize churches but are a waste of time in small congregations.
- B. Leaders must understand that achieving maximum congregational health and effectiveness always requires the implementation of *several* ideas and methods, not just one "silver bullet."
- C. Leaders must understand that achieving optimum mission and ministry results *is always a process*, not an event. Positive change in congregations more often happens by study, conversations with other respected persons, testing ideas and methods, and then refining the procedures through application, than by sending representatives to a seminar, workshop, or training event.

III. Leading a small church is in some ways more complex than leading a large one.

- A. Much of the complexity comes from the unique nature of small-membership churches. They are vastly more complicated than midsize or large congregations, especially in these ways.
 - Unique leadership structures
 - Unique behavior patterns
 - Unique sociological pressures
 - Unique growth obstacles
 - Unique ministry abilities
- B. The following material examines each of these five unique qualities.

IV. Small-membership churches have a unique leadership structure.

- A. Churches do not move closer to God's vision under their own energy. They go where their leaders take them. Leadership effectiveness is therefore the most important element in determining a congregation's effectiveness in ministry and mission.
- B. However, leadership in a small church is vastly different from, and in many ways far more complex, than leadership in large churches or leadership in business corporations. The organizational structures and interpersonal dynamics of small churches are not simple.
 - 1. The decision-making and authority-flow in business or corporate structures is accurately described as a pyramid. At the top, the CEO (Chief Executive Officer), the CFO (Chief Financial Officer), and the COO (Chief Operating Officer), usually working with a group of vice-presidents who lead divisions and/or a small board of directors comprised of key stockholders, make the big decisions. These corporate leaders hand off their marketing, policy, and procedure decisions to divisions, plants, employees, franchises, or retail outlets across the United States and in some cases across the world.
 - 2. Small congregations—even though their constitutions, or in denominations such as The United Methodist Church's *Book of Discipline*, or The Presbyterian Church (USA)'s *Book of Order*—describe the congregation as a “representative democracy,” do not operate that way on a day-to-day basis. Small congregations make decisions and exercise authority like “participatory democracies,” not like representative democracies that grant authority to elected and appointed leaders. In small congregations, many people who occupy no elected positions at the moment exert as much influence as the governing board. In some instances, small congregations allow one such influential individual to exercise veto-authority over a majority vote by the governing board.
 - 3. An accurate graphic depicting decision-making and the exercise of authority in small congregations is not a pyramid; it is more like a pancake. The decisions and authority “bubble up” from different sources and in different ways on different days, depending on the subject under discussion.
 - 4. Small congregations, regardless of their organizational wall charts, constitutions, or governance guidelines, *are not like corporations*. Small congregations make decisions and exercise authority *like families*. How do families decide something? They talk about it, and talk about it, and talk about it. Eventually, consensus emerges. The family decides on a direction and everyone (sometimes with one or two exceptions) does his or her part to get there.
- C. Congregations of every size contain three kinds of leaders, which function together like the sides of an equilateral triangle.
 - 1. The triangle's base consists of policy leaders (the church governing board).
 - 2. One side of the triangle is pastor leaders (clergy, paid program staff, and clerical staff).
 - 3. The third side of the triangle is program leaders (committee chairpersons, Sunday school teachers, women's organization officers, etc.).
- D. What if one of the triangle's three sides is weak (ineffective)? The triangle loses its perfection and collapses toward the middle, becoming a dysfunctional triangle, compromising congregational effectiveness. For example, many congregations' leaders believe that “if we could just get the right pastor . . .” However, when a governing board consistently operates in dysfunctional ways, an effective pastor cannot save the congregation from overall dysfunction.

- E. Each side of the triangle exerts leadership in two different and critically important ways:
1. Leaders must function effectively in their *ministry roles*.
 2. Leaders must function effectively in their *people relationships*.
- F. Like the two rails of a railroad track, those two leadership functions are equally important. Remove one rail and the train goes nowhere fast, its cargo-delivery ability compromised. Examples:
1. Joe teaches an adult Sunday school class. Joe is a nice guy, one of those teddy-bear types who love everyone. Warm and caring, a real joy to be around, everyone likes him. Yet when Joe stands up to teach the adult class, he instantly transports everyone to “Snores-Ville.” What is missing here? Joe lacks a quality essential to effective functioning in this ministry role. Instead of the gift of teaching, Joe has the gift of boring.
 2. Harry fills an important office on his congregation’s governing board. With a high IQ and excellent memory, he can quote verbatim large sections of his congregation’s governance manual, *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*. Unfortunately, Harry too frequently over-functions with his photographic memory, coupling the skill with an abrasive, dominating, and over-controlling manner. Harry is one of those people who make a greater contribution to a group by his absence than his presence. What is missing here? Harry has an important ministry skill but lacks the other quality essential to effective functioning in his ministry role, *people-relationship skills*.
 3. The pastor is an excellent human being, caring, pleasant, fun-loving, and joyful. Yet people complain that the pastor accomplishes great volumes of nothing in organizational and administrative leadership. Meetings are not scheduled. Newsletter announcements are promised but never printed. Phone calls are not returned. The overall result: most members feel that “nothing happens around here.” Many of the former leaders withdraw from active roles and sit in the bleachers. What is missing? The pastor has people skills but lacks a quality essential to effective functioning in every clergy role: administrative, organizational, and follow-through action on the details of committee and governing board plans.
- G. When we say that a congregation has a certain kind of personality, we are describing the mixture in that church of how skillfully the three kinds of leaders accomplish their two leadership functions: How skillfully the policy leaders, pastor leaders, and program leaders accomplish their various *ministry roles* and what kind of attitudinal and emotional climate they create through their *people relationships*. Graphically, every congregation’s personality is a triangle-shaped pancake with railroad tracks on each of its three sides.
- H. However, the leadership structure in small congregations is even more complex because the three kinds of leaders never work in a vacuum; they are walled-in by present circumstances and currently active church members. A congregation’s long-established, deeply ingrained personality pattern also impacts the ability of its three kinds of leaders in their functioning roles and their people relationships. Leaders inherit a congregational personality pattern that has evolved through time, layers of circumstances, the habits of previous generations of leaders, and years of cherished traditions. Sometimes called its “story,” that historic congregational personality pattern exerts great power on the present generation of leaders. Example: A young chairperson of a church governing board shared with a visiting consultant the lengthy description of how a big problem in that congregation got started. As the young board chairperson detailed the problem and why the leaders were dealing with it in what seemed like a dysfunctional way, the consultant began to suspect that this problem did not

- begin recently, so he asked, “When did this happen?” The young board chairperson replied, “In 1937! My grandfather was board chairperson at that time. You met him at the breakfast meeting this morning.” The way that church handled that 1937 conflict dictated how leaders were handling a similar problem now.
- I. In small congregations, long-standing, deeply ingrained congregational personality patterns have amazing ability to reproduce themselves across decades and generations of lay and clergy leaders. The actors change with each new generation of leaders, but the play stays the same. Researchers far more often observe this repetition in small churches than in midsize or larger congregations.
 - J. To learn how your church’s personality developed, Robert Dale suggests some questions that can surface old congregational visions, some of which are usually blocking movement toward contemporary mission and ministry effectiveness. (Robert Dale, *To Dream Again* [Nashville: Broadman Press])
 1. How would I describe our church’s first pastor and charter members?
 2. Was our church born out of positive circumstances or out of negative circumstances?
 3. What are the most unforgettable stories from the early years?
 4. What was the greatest growth period(s) of our church?
 5. Who was the pastor then? For how long? What were the pastor’s slogans and mottoes?
 6. What projects and new programs were initiated during the growth period?
 7. Which events and persons from that era are “magic” and are still remembered and discussed? Why?
 8. What or who are the “traditionalizing,” status quo maintenance forces?
 - K. Still another factor makes the leadership structure of a small-membership church much more complex than that of a large church. The metaphor of a leader who wears several hats could have been invented in a small-membership church. The most active leaders in small congregations often occupy several ministry roles simultaneously. For example, almost all policy leaders also carry two or three program-leader roles. By contrast, lay leaders in large churches far less frequently hold multiple offices and function in multiple leadership roles.
 1. In small churches, the three leadership roles—policy leader, program leader, and pastor leader—often blur together, because so many individuals wear multiple hats.
 2. Thus in small churches, malfunctioning on one of the two tracks—ministry skill or people skill—often reflects negatively on the quality of the whole congregation.
 3. In a large church, when something goes wrong on one of the two tracks—ministry skill or people skill—that malfunctioning effects only one part of the congregation, but in small churches the same malfunction on one of the two tracks by one-to-three influential laypersons may precipitate a perpetual crisis and/or a gradual congregational meltdown.
 4. Multiple-leadership-role hats also help to explain why changing the congregational personality pattern is far tougher in small churches. A short list of very long-term, highly change-resistant lay leaders own and operate the congregational personality. By contrast, in a large church, new pastor leaders, policy leaders, or program leaders can more quickly change the congregational personality pattern, especially when a new senior pastor appears on the scene with new ideas.
 - L. Still another factor that makes the leadership structure of small-membership churches more complex than in large congregations: in small churches, small-group dynamics often short-circuit the best-laid plans for positive change. Congregations of all sizes contain at least twenty churchgoer temperaments. Every congregation contains a few of the personality types listed

below. In midsized and large churches the negative personalities in this list may have little influence. However, in small churches those destructive personalities often wield enormous power. Take two minutes to put a check mark by *each temperament type* that you think *strongly influences* your congregation's atmosphere and effectiveness.

Twenty Church Member Temperament Types

- 1. Extreme Optimists** do more than see the silver lining in every cloud. They fail to see the cloud.
- 2. Chronic Pessimists** see only storm clouds. They predict that the sun will never shine again. (Most finance committees have at least one such person.)
- 3. Comedians (Court Jesters)** make fun the goal of every church gathering and keep leaders from taking themselves too seriously.
- 4. Strangers** just started attending worship; no one yet knows how they think and behave. (Typically, one or two long-term members appoint themselves to the role of instructing these strangers in "how we do things around here.")
- 5. Newcomers** who arrived during the last three years bring new perspectives, untarnished by knowledge of "how we do things around here." Some church leaders welcome their viewpoints; others try to protect the church from contamination.
- 6. Butterflies** flit from church to church, looking for something better.
- 7. Barnacles** stick to the church's hull like their ocean vessel counterparts. Leaders expend much energy to keep them from being a drag on progress.
- 8. True Friends** attend regularly and give generously. They dispassionately, rationally examine all new ideas. Untainted by selfish ego needs, they consistently see and work for God's best interests in mission and ministry.
- 9. Positive Matriarchs/Patriarchs** are long-term, highly respected, influential members.
- 10. Negative Matriarchs/Patriarchs** are long-term, influential, tiresome, over-controlling dictator members. Example: In a small town, one small congregation's negative patriarch was president of the only local bank, where most of the farmers obtained loans. They had to put up with his personality at the bank; they preferred not to put up with that personality on Sunday. That small church, over a period of twenty years, slowly died, then closed. (Actually, the negative patriarch murdered it.)
- 11. Obsessive Nostalgia Fanatics** long to recreate the congregation's past success. Their suggestions often begin with "I remember when . . ."
- 12. Financial Controllers** view all decisions through the lens of "We can't afford to do that!"
- 13. Building Controllers** view all decisions through the lens of "We mustn't change that! Uncle Harry donated the money for it. We'll have to keep it that way."
- 14. Program Controllers** view all decisions through "the way we have always done it." All new ideas are bad ideas.
- 15. Emotional Terrorists** maintain influence and control by their willingness to say and do things that intimidate normal people. They often use this "winning by intimidation" procedure in meetings, causing many church members to withdraw to the sidelines and/or withdraw to another congregation.
- 16. Peace Lovers** are obsessed with avoiding all conflict, no matter what the cost. They therefore always side with the controllers, nostalgia fanatics, emotional terrorists, and everyone who strongly resists making changes.
- 17. Covert Clergy** try to exert strong lay leadership (sometimes in a pleasant manner and sometimes in an over-controlling manner) as a way of (a) compensating for their regret and subconscious guilt at not having become a clergyperson or (b) demonstrating that because "my father was a pastor," I naturally know more than most people about "how we should do things around here."
- 18. Clergy Controllers** drop by during the pastor's first week of tenure (a) to recruit him or her for their pet project or (b) to let the pastor know they have power and he or she must therefore listen to and receive guidance from them.
- 19. Clergy Antagonists** automatically oppose all of the pastor's ideas.
- 20. Clergy Supporters** automatically affirm all of the pastor's ideas.

M. Which of the temperament types that you checked *positively* influence your congregation's atmosphere and contribute to its mission and ministry effectiveness?

1.

2.

3.

N. Which of the temperament types that you checked *negatively* influence your congregation's atmosphere and inhibit its mission and ministry effectiveness?

1.

2.

3.

O. The tyranny of misguided core-value systems can produce negative destiny in churches *of every size*. But inappropriate core-value systems are especially damaging in small congregations where change-resistance is so strong due to the unique leadership structure factors cited above. Example:

“Two years ago,” the dedicated layman said, “we wrote a mission statement and set membership-growth goals. It didn't help. What are we doing wrong?”

Like dedicated leaders in many other churches, this man does not know that churches *always unconsciously act on their core values*, not on the goals they set! Churches whose goals match their values tend to achieve those goals. When core values do not match goals, the values always win.

Jesus taught his first disciples three core values through The Great Commandment and The Great Commission (Luke 10:25-37, Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 2:41-42). Jesus's three core values summarize as follows: (a) Help people grow spiritually in their relationship with God. (b) Love your neighbors in church, community, and world. (c) Offer Christ to people outside your walls. Using Jesus' three core values, the early disciples and congregations continued Jesus' ministry. The result: healthy, effective churches that spread across the world.

Clergy and lay leadership in *healthy* congregations develop and implement strategies and procedures that accomplish in their communities all three of Jesus' core values in a balanced way. Individual committees and staff may of necessity need to focus on only *one* of Jesus' three core values. However, in its overall priorities and methods each congregation must accomplish *all three* of Jesus' core values. Failure to behave in ways that live out *all three* of Jesus' core values is fatal to a congregation's health and mission/ministry effectiveness, thereby jeopardizing its future existence.

Clergy and lay leadership in *unhealthy* congregations tend to focus on one of Jesus' three core values. Their clergy and lay leadership tend to consciously or unconsciously believe the myth that Jesus' other two core values happen automatically, as a byproduct of focusing on the one core value about which they feel the most passionate. In other words, when clergy and lay leadership make Jesus' three core values a multiple-choice question, they produce *unhealthy*, ineffective congregations.

Many small churches value “loving our neighbors” through faithfully caring for members and community service. Pride in that value-system focus sometimes blocks leaders from noticing that a 1965 worship style equals (a) not offering Christ to young-adult families and (b) gradually kills their church because most young adults decide to worship elsewhere.

The Tragedy: Congregations that focus on one of Jesus’ core values and neglect the others seldom see that fatal flaw.

The Certainty: Your congregation’s values determine its future health and effectiveness!

1. Which of Jesus’ three core values drives most of the decisions in your church?
2. Which of Jesus’ three core values drives the fewest decisions?

An eminent church sociologist, Dr. Wade Clark Roof, conducted national research in congregations of The United Methodist Church. After examining the way churches spent most of their time and energy, he reported that “loving your neighbor” by helping less fortunate people in the community and caring for hurting people in their congregation was an important priority among United Methodists. However, Roof found that only 26 percent of clergy and lay leaders thought “offering Christ to people outside the walls” should be on their congregation’s agenda. Roof added that he did not mean that the other 74 percent of clergy and lay leaders made evangelism activities a *low* priority in their congregation: evangelization efforts were *totally missing* from their congregational agenda.

Does not this research help to explain, not just the sizeable membership decline in The United Methodist Church since 1965, but the membership declines of the other mainline denominations?

V. Small-membership churches exhibit unique behavior patterns.

- A. Many of these behavior patterns are positive. Some are negative.
- B. Working as a group, take not more than three minutes to make two lists of adjectives—one positive and one negative—that members or your group think describe behaviors in your congregation.

1. Positive Adjectives:

2. Negative Adjectives:

- C. Observers of small-membership churches note at least seven forms of unique behavior. Each of these seven behaviors differs from behaviors in midsize churches that average 100-to-300 in worship attendance. However, the seven unique behaviors in small-membership churches come into much sharper focus when contrasted with behaviors in large churches that exceed 300 in average worship attendance. Thus, the following illustrations compare small-church behaviors with behaviors in large congregations.

1. Priorities

- a. The priorities in small churches that average fewer than 100 in worship attendance focus on face-to-face relationships. Small churches resemble large families, most of whose members do everything as one group, thereby experiencing a powerful sense of belonging. In the small church, the individual's relationship with the other members matters more than the performance quality of what happens in the congregation's programming.
- b. By contrast, the overall priorities in large churches of more than 300 in average worship attendance tend to focus more on *performance quality* than on *people relationships*. Many people who attend large churches are seeking quality programming for themselves and their children: quality music, quality preaching, and quality everything. At the people-relationship level, many large church attendees are looking for anonymity more than they are for the intimacy of a small family group.
- c. Example: The scene is a small-church worship service. During the offertory, a twelve-year-old boy plays a viola solo. The boy is not all that good with the viola. However, on the third pew on the right side of the sanctuary sit his grandfather and grandmother, long-term, active members of this congregation. His parents, an assortment of family friends, and a few other relatives are scattered throughout the sanctuary. For this congregation, the quality of the viola solo is irrelevant. A large congregation of 1,200 in average worship attendance could not permit that quality of viola solo, so it would never happen. Why not? In large churches, the quality of what happens in the worship service must be consistently exceptional. Leaders know that only a few of the worshippers would know the boy and his family; therefore, most worshipers would feel negative rather than positive about the performance. Leaders also know that many among the numerous first-time and repeat worship visitors would feel turned off by the viola solo's damage to their worship experience.

2. Pastors

- a. Small-church attendees expect close personal relationships with the pastor and his or her family.
- b. The majority of large-church attendees expect to know their pastor primarily through large gatherings such as worship, funerals, weddings, fellowship dinners, and through what he or she writes in the newsletter.

3. Personnel

- a. Small churches rely heavily on lay volunteers for getting things done.
- b. Large churches, by contrast, rely far more on paid professional staff that gives direction to lay leaders and members for accomplishing ministries.

4. Programming

- a. Small-church attendees expect minimal programming, often consisting of worship, Sunday school, choir, youth activities, and a women's organization. Thus, most of the members view small-church pastors who exhibit enthusiastic support of those five programs and genuine concern for the church members and people in this community as highly effective, even though the church stays the same size for many years.
- b. Large-church attendees, by contrast, expect a cafeteria of programs that meet the spiritual, emotional, and physical needs of people of all ages.

5. Participation

- a. Small-church attendees expect everyone to participate in every gathering. Every absent member is a matter of concern, because small churches are in the individual caring business. If an active member is unexpectedly absent from a small-church gathering, several people wonder whether she is out of town, ill, or angry. During the next couple of days, one or several people check with her to find out.
- b. Large-church attendees, on the other hand, are expected to pick and choose the church activities in which they participate. Members who do not attend everything are not viewed as disloyal or alienated.

6. Procedures

- a. Small-church attendees expect their high involvement levels to give them ownership and control of decision-making procedures. Thus, the governing body meetings in small churches often have the emotional feel of town hall gatherings in small New England villages. In small churches, people not present at the meeting sometimes exert strong influence. Example: When someone asks at a governing board meeting, "What will George Murphy think of this decision?" the group may decide to get George's opinion before they vote on this matter. Why? They know that a majority vote does not always mean that the board's wishes can happen. In some instances, one respected, strongly opinionated individual not present at the meeting can successfully veto the action of twenty-five board members.
- b. The small church is a participatory democracy in which consensus of the members determines procedures. The large church is a representative democracy that determines its procedures through elected representatives, appointed representatives, and paid staff.
- c. Because small churches act like families, their members can fight intensively and remain together, whereas large congregations may split when they cannot agree on similar issues.
- d. Small-membership churches give their pastors little or no authority for congregational decision-making. On the day the pastor arrives, he or she finds no leadership-role vacancies. They are already filled by influential laypersons. Most of the members highly respect the new pastor. However, they view him or her as a "chaplain-outsider" who will not be here long. "So we need to decide things to suite ourselves." Small-church leaders expect the pastor to preach, teach, visit the sick, bury the dead, and marry the willing, but they do not expect the pastor to exert leadership, especially at the point of making changes. Someone made only a slight overstatement with the assertion that leaders in small-membership churches tend to define change as "changing pastors," not as expecting pastors to change church procedures.
- e. By contrast, large-church attendees expect to delegate a great deal of authority to the senior pastor, the staff, and the elected and appointed governing-board members. Leaders and members in a large church give the senior pastor more authority on his or her first day in the parish than small-church laypersons give the pastor after five years of faithful service.
- f. Lay leaders in small-membership churches dislike written communication, which is one of the reasons they have a love-hate relationship with their denomination. Regional and national denominational structures, by necessity,

communicate on paper. How do families communicate at the dinner table? Do they circulate memos? No! They talk with one another. Little wonder that small churches get irritated with “all this paperwork” from their Districts, Regions, Synods, and Presbyteries.

- g. By contrast, midsize and large churches must use bales of paper, barrels of ink, and tons of electrons in E-mails and Web sites to communicate with and among members, committees, governing boards, and ministries. Lay leaders in larger churches know that the oral grapevine does not get to everyone, and that the oral grapevine frequently distributes inaccurate information to the people and groups within its reach.

7. Property

- a. Small-church attendees expect people to treat the church building as they do their own home, with carefully followed traditions for room use, turning off the lights, and tidiness. Attendees view many objects as sacred, with special history and meaning (like the precious personal items in our homes). Moving or changing certain of those objects can be highly offensive to some members, feeling like an insult to their congregation’s heritage and “the people who built this church.”
 - b. Large-church attendees expect people to treat the church building like a public institution through which much traffic flows for many different reasons. Their attendees do not expect everyone to take meticulously good care of the building, and they expect high maintenance costs.
- D. The following three statements summarize the way people measure “optimum behavior” in small, midsize, and large churches:
1. *The small church is “people-centered.”* Thus, when people in a small congregation begin “murmuring” about their pastor’s inadequacies, what is the most negative comment they can make? (Murmuring is a King James Translation word from the Old Testament account about Moses: “They murmured against Moses” [Exodus 15:24].) When a small church’s members murmur, “I’m not sure the pastor really cares about people,” they are stating a horrific accusation. Members of small churches understand themselves to be in the caring-for-people business. Therefore, the most important role their pastor plays is “Chaplain.” If the members view their Chaplain-CEO as lacking compassion for people, they feel their church has the wrong kind of leader.
 2. *The midsize church is “activity-centered.”* When the “murmuring” begins in a midsize church, the complaints more often mention something that is not happening the right way in one of the church’s programs, groups, or ministries. Example: “When Pastor Smith was here, we had twenty-five high school kids in the youth group. I understand that only about three attend now. We have a big problem!” Since people in midsize churches primarily feel connected to it through some group or activity or ministry, a good metaphor for pastor in midsize churches is “Y Director” rather than “Chaplain.” The midsize-church pastor must shepherd several groups and ministries. What happens when pastors who have developed skill as chaplains relocate to midsize congregations where attendees measure clergy effectiveness by how well he or she keeps several group and program plates spinning in the air at the same time? Considerable transition stress may result during the first eighteen months (for both the pastor and the congregation).

3. *The large church is “event-centered.”* When the “murmuring” begins in a large church, the complaints often mention something not going well in one of the congregation’s events. Fifty-two of these events happen on Sunday morning each year. Other events happen at special seasons of the year. People in large churches tend to count things when they judge clergy performance. They look around the sanctuary and decide whether it is “as full as it used to be.” They look at the financial report to see if the money is adding up properly. Or one lay leader may say to another, “We have always had about 700 people at the Annual Thanksgiving Dinner, but I don’t think we had more than 200 this year. Sunday morning attendance seems down too. Something needs to be done about this!”
- E. Pastors of small churches are happier and more effective if they understand that this organization functions like what sociologists call a “folk society.” Adapted from a list by David R. Ray in *Small Churches Are the Right Size* (New York: Pilgrim Press).
1. The group contains a small number of people.
 2. The people are well-acquainted with one another.
 3. They have a strong sense of group belonging.
 4. They feel strongly bonded to the building in which they meet.
 6. They see oral communication as important and written communication as irrelevant.
 7. They experience relationships as ends in themselves, not as means to an end. Thus, when a new pastor suggests, “We need to set some goals,” the laypeople feel he or she is speaking a foreign language. Set goals? We are already achieving our goals!
 8. They value stability more than change.
 9. They attach moral worth to traditional ways of doing things. Thus, changing a procedure feels like much more than changing a procedure; it feels like changing a cherished value.

VI. Small-membership churches serve under unique sociological pressures.

- A. Most adults with birthdays between 1946 and 1974 grew up in large school systems, so they feel comfortable in large churches. When they look for quality programming in a church, they expect to find it in a large one, so about 75 percent of these adult church-shoppers look there.
1. This explains why large churches are growing larger and more numerous in all of the American denominations.
 2. This explains why midsize churches are growing smaller and fewer in all American denominations.
- B. Why, then, are small-membership churches holding their own in both membership size and numbers of congregations in all American denominations?
1. Many pre-1946-birth-date church attendees prefer small-membership churches.
 2. Approximately 20 percent of Americans of all ages are not emotionally comfortable in groups larger than 100.

VII. Small-membership churches face unique growth obstacles.

- A. These growth obstacles are slightly different in three size categories of small churches.
1. Churches with up to forty in worship attendance:
 - a. The opportunity for positive relationships in this small group attracts some people, but the limited programming repels many other people.
 - Youth groups are usually impossible to build.
 - The quality nursery so essential to young couples is often inadequate and/or understaffed.

- b. The pastor learns that when he or she brings new people into membership, the long-term members may or may not accept those individuals into the “fellowship circle.” The most insidious and difficult-to-correct example of this pattern is the “family chapel,” dominated by a matriarch- or a patriarch-led family tree. Since the people in this family tree already have built-in emotional support from other family members, they may see little reason for fellowship activities at the church. Newcomers, however, are often puzzled about why the congregation schedules so few all-church dinners and fellowship events, which newcomers appreciated in former churches and found were good ways to get acquainted.
 - c. The conflict frequently observed when a congregation grows beyond forty in worship attendance seems to stem from the dissatisfaction generated by a change in self-identity.
 - Healthy groups of fewer than forty people usually “do everything together.” Larger groups need subgroups that provide personal interaction opportunities.
 - When the group that exceeds forty begins to develop subgroups, some church leaders resist that change because “it seems like we are breaking up the family.”
 - d. To grow beyond forty in worship attendance, a congregation must
 - Provide a “covert” volunteer nursery attendant who (unobtrusively and without fanfare) steps into service when first-time or repeat worship visitors with small children appear, plus an adequate room to house that nursery. Without this strategy, the congregation is saying, “Young parents are not welcome here.”
 - Institute two or three kindergarten-through-elementary Sunday school classes. If the attending households have no children in the kindergarten-through-sixth-grade age range, the congregation stands on the brink of a cliff from which it has a 90 percent chance of falling to its death within two decades. To prevent that fatality, the church’s leaders must put forth the considerable energy required to reinvent two or three classes for young children by using procedures outlined in Turnaround Strategy #16 later in this resource.
 - If the church has as many as two or three junior-high and/or senior-high youth, institute a youth-group model outlined in the resource cited in Turnaround Strategy #17 later in this resource.
 - If only one adult Sunday school class exists at present, add an additional one.
 - Develop bonding procedures that welcome newcomers into the church family, as in Turnaround Strategy #7 later in this resource.
2. Churches with forty-one to seventy in worship attendance:
 - a. Most churches of this size resist adding the new classes or groups that allow entry points by which new attendees can feel part of the church family. Why? Adult-class members do not realize that the social climate of their class feels emotionally “closed” to most newcomers.
 - b. A few churches of this size resist membership growth through the dominating over-control of one or two influential laypersons who have decided that change is more trouble than it is worth.
 - c. As churches grow to seventy in average worship attendance, some influential leaders must share authority. When that happens, some of those leaders feel a loss of self-esteem. As more people participate in decision-making, those leaders react in ways that cause uneasiness in the church.
 - d. To grow beyond seventy in average worship attendance, a congregation must
 - Institute a junior-high and senior-high youth ministry.
 - Employ a paid nursery attendant.
 - Add another adult Sunday school class or study/discussion group for young adults, using procedures described in Turnaround Strategy #18 later in this resource.
 3. Churches with seventy-one to one hundred in worship attendance:
 - a. This size church also resists adding new groups and classes, but for a different reason.
 - b. When worship attendance approaches 100, members start having trouble putting a name

with all the faces. They feel their family is becoming a crowd, changing its nature in ways that create a sense of personal, emotional loss. Long-term members also tend to resist the establishment of the subgroups essential to future growth; they feel that new groups damage the congregation's identity and sense of personal belonging.

- c. Some experts believe that until worship attendance moves beyond 120, most of the attendees have trouble seeing the benefits of belonging to both the congregation and a small group within the congregation. (Craig Kennet Miller, *Next Church. Now* [Nashville: Discipleship Resources])
 - d. To grow beyond ninety-five in average worship attendance, a congregation must institute subgroups.
 - Start one or two new adult groups of some kind, such as adult classes, a men's softball team, or a weeknight study-discussion group.
 - Develop a young-adult fellowship nucleus that centers in a group such as an adult class, a monthly dinner club, a monthly social get-together, an athletic activity, or a choir.
 - Remember that age-eighteen-to-forty-four, young adults are in a developmental stage at which they have greater appreciation for and obtain greater benefit from small groups that provide social interaction, emotional support, study/discussion opportunities, and prayer development experiences than do most adults in more advanced developmental stages.
- B. At the boundaries of each change in size described above, some congregants celebrate the transition while other church members experience the changes as a trauma. People in these two groups have difficulty understanding each other's viewpoints, which tends to create conflict, since both groups feel strongly that they have the congregation's best interests at heart. One group wants to protect the church's family-type identity. For them, the strength and appeal of the previous church size seems destroyed, while the strength and appeal of the next size is not yet fully in place. For church members in that group, the result is confusion, anxiety, and stress. The other group of members (usually a smaller group) wants to protect the congregation's ability to reproduce itself into future generations. For additional observations regarding these transition states, see Alice Mann, *The In-Between Church* (Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 1998), p. 28.
- C. Thus, all three sizes of congregation with fewer than 100 in worship attendance resist membership growth.
- D. Anthony Pappas has said that a small church is like a loaf of French bread. It smells wonderful and tastes great, but what a thick crust it has and how hard it is to get into!
- E. As you look at the following list of reasons why small churches unconsciously resist membership growth (adapted from a list originated by Anthony Pappas), check the ones you feel are true of your church right now. This gives you clues regarding the most important methods to consider in the list of turnaround strategies in Section X later in this resource.
1. Small churches are very tough and hard to kill, but that toughness makes them hard to change. Across the years, many of their past experiences with change have been negative. For them, change has often meant loss. No wonder they are so highly resistant to change, especially in small towns and rural areas with declining populations or inner-city churches in ethnically changing neighborhoods.
 2. Small churches are effective at carrying the culture of their members into the next decade—but they often maintain a cocoon of isolation from the culture of their surrounding community.
 3. The small-group relationships in small churches are positive for the participating individuals—but smallness can lead to feelings of low self-esteem in comparison to larger churches nearby.
 4. The excellent ability of small churches to affirm the pastor as the central chaplain figure can also lead to "scapegoating," as some people blame the pastor for their church's lack of growth and long for a new messiah who can lead us out of the wilderness.

5. The close-knit group feeling in the small church provides emotional intimacy but tends to build invisible walls that keep new people out. (The leaders are often unaware that their “one big happy family” is not effective at welcoming in-laws and that their congregation unknowingly tends to make newcomers feel like strangers at a family reunion.)
6. Small churches care about people as individuals—but that tends to negate their ability to plan and organize for the future. They care so much about the feelings of individual people that they allow one or two individuals to control the plans that would build a stronger future. (This is why change-agent leaders must consult with influential individuals—not just committees or boards—before and during the execution of plans.)
7. The small church’s focus on the past provides familiar security in a fast-changing world—but this can easily produce the same result as driving a car while staring at the rearview mirror.
8. The small church’s organization systems look deceptively simple and easy to run—but due to its built-in change-resistance the system is more competent at rerunning yesterday than at reinventing tomorrow.
9. The small church is family oriented, but this gives many of the members a veto vote, unlike larger churches in which fewer people have such powerful ability to stop change.
10. Small churches tend to focus on survival—rather than on effective ways to offer Christ to people outside their walls.

VIII. Small-membership churches have unique ministry abilities.

- A. Small-membership churches are more prevalent than any other church type.
 1. In the approximately 350,000 congregations of various denominations in the United States, roughly 50 percent average fewer than 100 in morning worship attendance.
 2. That is a great many retail outlets—far more locations than McDonald’s or Burger King.
 3. No midsized or large church was born that size. Like husky, six-foot, four-inch football players, they all started small.
- C. Small churches have an excellent track record in nurturing spiritual growth among their members.
 1. The intimate peer-group pressure draws people into conformity in quick and powerful ways not possible in larger congregations.
 2. An incredible number of national- and world-church leaders grew up in small churches.
 3. Small churches provide excellent training centers for young people who will become strong lay leaders in other congregations as they grow older.
- D. Small churches often minister to their pastors better than larger churches—so much so that the pastors in small churches often grow and change more than the churches they serve.

Study/Discussion/Planning Session #2

PEP Team Member: Prepare for your PEP Team's discussion session by making notes in the margins, especially with regard to questions such as the following.

1. Do you recall instances where this paragraph or section was true in your personal experience and/or in a congregation?
2. What would you like to add or subtract from this paragraph or section?
3. In what ways does the idea in this section or paragraph seem true of our congregation?
4. What suggested methods from this section or paragraph should we consider using in our congregation?

PEP Team Discussion Leader: As you move through this discussion session, ask PEP Team members to take turns sharing their answers to the above questions.

IX. How can small-membership churches experience turnaround?

- A. What is a "turnaround strategy"?
- B. A turnaround strategy enables a church, after experiencing a plateau or declining vitality for several years, to experience a new sense of vision, hopefulness, and effectiveness in continuing Christ's ministry to its community.
- C. Listed below are twenty-five turnaround strategies for small-membership churches.

Turnaround Strategy #1: Recognize that a high median-age of local members can terminate your congregation's future in two decades. One congregation learned that only 6 percent of local members were under age 18, whereas 28 percent of the county residents were that age. In that same church, 65 percent of the local members were age-65-plus, whereas only 11 percent of the county residents were that age. These percentages told the church's leaders that without a turnaround strategy it would become extinct in twenty years. (To compare those age-range percentages in your church, go to www.census.gov and click on your state, then on your county.) The shock therapy provided by presenting this information to a church's governing board can sometimes help its leaders awaken from their lack of recognition that the congregation is slowly going out of business.

Turnaround Strategy #2: Recognize the natural human inclination to want progress without making any changes. A national study by *American Demographics Magazine* revealed that 47 percent of American people strongly resist change. Another 17 percent of Americans, while they do not strongly resist change, are "peace lovers." Members of this group do not care whether something changes or stays the same, as long as their group maintains peace and unity.

Guess who the 17 percent in the peace-lover category always side with when someone proposes a change in their corporation, club, or congregation? Of course! The peace lovers side with the 47 percent who strongly resist change, because members of that group express their resistance in highly vocal ways.

This explains why the governing board of a congregation should never vote on a major change at the first meeting at which it discusses the change. Say something like, "Let's discuss it tonight, then give people time to think about it. We'll vote on it at the next meeting or perhaps a few months from now."

Lyle Schaller, America's most highly respected church consultant, has said that (a) two-thirds of congregations could double in size during the next decade and (b) that same two-thirds of congregations will not be around fifty years from now.

What makes the difference between those two congregational outcomes? Two factors: (a) Are the pastors willing to pay the price required to lead change? (b) Are the lay people willing to make the changes?

Turnaround Strategy #3: Recognize that if we continue doing everything “the way we have always done it,” we continue to get the same results. The old jest that defines insanity as “doing something the same way the next time and expecting different results” more often applies to leaders of congregations than they care to admit.

Turnaround Strategy #4: Recognize that even when the changes we make start achieving positive results, those changes generate at least four kinds of anxiety. Effective church leaders view these anxieties as what they are—anxieties—not just bullheaded resistance to change. Four kinds of success anxiety:

- Homesickness for familiar ways of doing things, as when Moses led the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery. Note the biblical record. Moses rescued these slaves from certain death. Yet immediately after another life-changing miracle when they crossed the Red Sea, a group of change-resistant leaders formed a “back to Egypt Committee.”
- Fear of the unknown, as when Joshua urged the Israelites to invade the Promised Land.
- Fear of failure, as when Nehemiah led the Israelites back from Babylonian exile and rebuilt the Jerusalem wall.
- Uneasiness with newcomers, as when Paul convinced the Jerusalem Council to welcome non-Jews into the Church.

Turnaround Strategy #5: Decide to do whatever it takes to increase ministry and outreach impact in your community; thus, insuring that your congregation will be alive and thrive in twenty years. The value system of the World War II generation—“Good people do whatever it takes, make whatever sacrifices are necessary!”—reappeared following the 9-11-01 twin towers attack. To avert gradual disappearance from the face of their community, members of many small-membership churches must replace their sense of complacency with that same “whatever it takes” value system.

Turnaround Strategy #6: Increase the percentage of attendees who pray daily. Prayer is a powerful but often under-utilized resource among people who lead change in congregations, especially small congregations.

Few endeavors increase insights and spiritual maturity in adults more than prayer. Increase the percentage of members who pray daily by using, both within the PEP Team and throughout the entire congregation, procedures outlined for use of the prayer card titled *The Secret to Abundant Living: Learning How to Ask*, downloaded free of charge from the www.TheParishPaper.com Web site.

Turnaround Strategy #7: Build a warm, caring, fellowship focus that emphasizes concern for individuals. Effective small churches come across as more people-oriented than program-driven. (In small towns and rural areas, that people-orientation includes residents of the community, not just church members.)

- A. An ancient definition says that home is “a place where they have to take you in, no matter what.” That phrase pictures what every congregation should feel like, to every member.
 - Psychologists use one word to describe that feeling—acceptance.
 - Leaders of effective small churches develop systematic procedures by which they communicate that feeling of acceptance to newcomers.
- B. Without organized, intentional ways to build strong relationship-bridges, newcomers in small churches continue to feel like outsiders.
 - Those bridge-building failures account for the many sad stories from newcomers who never found a sense of belonging in a small church.

- One layman put it this way: “They welcomed us into the building but would not let us into the congregation.”
 - Lyle Schaller once identified that danger with this statement: “The fellowship glue that holds a small church together is often the very thing that keeps it from getting larger.”
- C. Contrary to what that frequently observed phenomenon implies, small churches are not against membership growth; they are against changing the characteristics that make them unique and against replacing their present family relationships with relationships with strangers.
- D. An effective small church is more than a friendly church; it is a church of friends. To make new attendees into new friends, effective small churches develop rituals that say to newcomers in unmistakable ways, “You belong!” Two examples:
- (1) Ask a long-term member household (a patriarch or matriarch type if possible) to invite a new couple or individual to their house for dinner and also invite two other long-term-member couples or individuals.
 - The following month, ask one of the other long-term couples from the first dinner to do the same thing, inviting two long-term couples or individuals not at last month’s dinner.
 - Ditto the third month.
 - The objective is not merely for the newcomers to get acquainted with long-timers. This organized-friendliness procedure increases the likelihood that eight to twelve members of the small-church’s establishment get sufficiently acquainted with newcomers to genuinely take them into the family.
 - (2) Charles Yarborough perfected the following strategy at First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Albany, Kentucky:
 - The father in Jesus’ parable put rings on his prodigal son’s fingers and shoes on his feet. He then killed the fatted calf and gave a party to welcome his returning son.
 - The “Dinner of Love” is our version of that parable. When someone joins our church, we have a dinner party the following Wednesday night. Our members cancel all church programs, Bible study, etc., for this “Dinner of Love.”
 - The new member(s) is the guest of honor. We use the good tableware for this meal—china, glass, etc.—no paper plates. We urge the new members to invite other family members and guests to the dinner. We do not let them bring a dish; it is all on us.
 - When the guest(s) of honor (new member) arrives at the church, we seat him or her in a special place with the pastor, board chair, Sunday school teacher, etc. In front of his or her plate are cards and letters from all of our members. Each new member receives a beautifully wrapped leather Bible with his or her name engraved on it. When we welcome a family that involves a husband, wife, and child, each person gets a Bible.
 - Asking long-term members to prepare those welcome cards and letters helps them bond to, open their hearts to, and open their fellowship circle to, new members of their church family.
- E. In churches of every size, two experiences are crucial to insuring that close to 100 percent of church newcomers are still active attendees after one year:
- Newcomers need to get involved in a Sunday school class or group of some kind within the first six weeks after becoming regular worship attendees.
 - Newcomers need to assume some type of church responsibility or job within the first six

months after establishing a regular worship attendance pattern.

- F. In the small church, however, without intentional, organized procedures for expressing “Welcome Home!” acceptance, those two classic bonding techniques—a group and a job—are not as effective as they are in midsize and large congregations.

Turnaround Strategy #8: Overcome tendencies toward low congregational self-esteem with thinking and behavior habits that paint a positive, hopeful future. Low self-esteem can happen in congregations of any size. For example, a congregation that averaged 700 in worship attendance in southwestern Kansas City felt low self-esteem because it was only a few blocks from the largest United Methodist Church in the United States and two of the largest Presbyterian Churches in the country (the largest of these three churches averages 12,000 in worship). However, small congregations that average fewer than 100 in worship are particularly prone to seeing themselves in a negative light in comparison with nearby, larger churches.

- A. An atmosphere of congregational “low self-esteem” is especially likely if the church was previously much larger than it is at present.
- B. Declining population statistics that drain members give small churches in small towns an additional reason to feel low self-esteem, as do the membership losses that result from ethnically-changing inner-city neighborhoods.
- (1) Most members in these congregations either do not know or have difficulty remembering that one out of four growing-membership congregations in the United States serve in a declining and/or changing population base.
 - Factors other than demographic trends control a congregation’s future size.
 - Yes, churches find it easier to swim downstream in a growing-population community than to swim upstream in a declining-population community. However, if you do not know how to swim, it does not matter which way you swim. Even worse, if you are not motivated to learn how to swim, or you see yourself as someone who “couldn’t possible learn how to swim,” you sink even sooner.
 - (2) Nor do clergy and laypersons in small churches always recognize that membership size is not the only quality that makes a small church effective or the only factor that gives it low or high self-esteem.
- C. Whatever the cause, low congregational self-esteem is like small doses of arsenic placed in breakfast cereal for several years. The person weakens and dies, unaware of the cause. Oswald Chambers wrote, “Joy is the nature of God in my blood.” If church leaders—due to whatever circumstances—act like they need a transfusion, people stay away in droves.
- D. If congregational self-esteem stays low for several years, the negative feelings can lead to one of seven kinds of “disabled church” personality patterns, some of which originate from a list by David R. Ray, *Small Churches Are the Right Size* (New York: Pilgrim Press):
- (1) *In the “survival mentality church,”* well-meaning, highly dedicated leaders focus on holding expenses down, holding the heating and cooling costs down, holding the conflict down, and keeping the doors open. Unknowingly, this survival-focus slowly kills the congregation by (a) reducing creative thinking in mission and ministry and (b) diverting attention away from efforts to accomplish Jesus’s Great Commandment and Great Commission—the three values that insure congregational survival.
 - (2) *In the “fortress mentality church,”* members may feel they are “under siege” because the denominational leaders are trying to “close our church.” Members of one such congregation complained to a visiting consultant that “the district superintendent tried to make us merge with a congregation six miles away.” After listening awhile, the consultant asked when this effort

happened. “In 1963,” they replied. Their leadership focus had become “resistance to closing our church,” an insidious form of survival mentality that almost always guarantees that the church eventually dies. Churches that focus on survival rarely do.

- (3) *The “arrogant church”* is often the product of a very specialized—sometimes conservative and sometimes liberal—theology. Some churches become so preoccupied with feeling proud of their evangelical or theologically-conservative viewpoints that they assume such thinking assures congregational health. Other churches become equally preoccupied with feelings of pride that they have more progressive or liberal views than do less enlightened congregations in their denomination or community. The evidence indicates that God rewards congregational humility, not congregational pride. The Old Testament adage is as true of congregations as of individuals: “Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before fall (Proverbs 16:18).”
 - (4) *In the “depressive church,”* members have developed a dedicated pessimism bred by decades of negative circumstances. The atmosphere in such congregations dissuades most newcomers from hanging around. (Only a few newcomers who suffer from chronic feelings of depression feel at home in such churches.) Thus, the congregation remains small while its members are unaware that its depressive atmosphere repels most outsiders who visit.
 - (5) *In the “cold personality church,”* members never understand why “more people do not want to attend our church.” A pastor observed, “To be healthy and growing, every congregation needs at least one (two or three is better) member who is an extreme extrovert.” The pastor added, “Our leaders are fine people, but they are all introverts. That creates a climate in which members lack the skill and inclination to help newcomers feel at home. It also creates an atmosphere that attracts very few newcomer-extroverts.”
 - (6) *The “passive church”* operates in a constant state of discussing exciting possibilities but lacks leaders who take action. The interim pastor in one such congregation was amazed at the enthusiasm and plans in the first governing board meeting she attended. At the meeting a month later, nothing had been done to accomplish any of those plans. Soon, the interim recognized that the governing board meetings were not a means of facilitating ministry; they were a substitute for ministry. The leaders lacked follow-through inclination. They had monthly pep rallies but never fielded a team.
 - (7) *In the “blaming church,”* several long-term leaders engage in a high volume of fault-finding regarding other members, new members, and the pastor. Fortunately, this is a tiny minority of all congregations, but the pattern is extremely destructive, both to laypeople and to clergy. One such congregation, 165 years old, had been served by 112 pastors. One researcher calls this pattern “an abbreviated Easter Week church.” When the newly appointed pastor arrives, the congregation experiences Palm Sunday (when the Jews welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem with exorbitant enthusiasm). “This pastor is exactly what we need. This pastor will do things exactly right.” (Translation: exactly the way I want it done!) In such churches, the distance from Palm Sunday to Good Friday is usually about nine months. At that point, the people begin doing to the pastor what people did to Jesus on Good Friday. The big difference: In the blaming church, Sunday never comes; resurrection never follows. The congregation requests a new pastor and repeats the destructive ritual. Clergy, especially if they are young pastors with little experience, need to avoid two dangers in such congregations. (a) Clergy should avoid “internalizing” the experience (“It must be me; I must not be cut out for professional ministry”). (b) Clergy should avoid “generalizing” the experience (“All churches must be this way; I’m not emotionally capable of handling this kind of role”).
- E. Vision and joy are the two key words for maintaining high self-esteem in small churches. Vision and joy happen in two ways:
- (1) Frequent celebrations—of every accomplishment—regardless of how small.
 - *Healthy individuals know when to say,* “Yes, I’ll take on that project and add it to my schedule.” Likewise, healthy small congregations know when to add some program or project to strengthen their mission and ministry effectiveness.

- *Healthy individuals know when to say, “No, I can’t fit that into my busy schedule.”* Likewise, healthy small congregations know when to say, “No, that idea does not fit our size church.”
 - *Healthy individuals know when to say, “Whoopie! It’s time to celebrate!”* Likewise, healthy small congregations, to an even greater extent than healthy large churches, find frequent reasons to celebrate successful accomplishments. Such celebrations counterbalance their natural tendency to concentrate on the negative so much that it converts their overall attitude to that orientation.
- (2) An effective annual planning process (see the next section in this resource).
- F. A big part of every small-church pastor’s task is to create a pervasive sense of hopefulness, without which congregational vitality is impossible. This comes down to four prescriptions:
- (1) Focus mostly on the future and avoid a preoccupation with past events and experiences.
 - (2) Speak positively about other people at every opportunity and avoid speaking negatively about other people.
 - (3) Speak optimistically about the future and avoid speaking pessimistically about the future.
 - (4) If the pastor’s personality is naturally predisposed in the opposite directions, only concentrated daily prayer that asks for God’s life-changing power and twenty-eight days of intense practice will change those pre-dispositions. Even then, clergy must expend much and continuous emotional energy to avoid falling back into negative patterns that drain away their hope rather than add it.
- G. However, even if pastors are naturally hopeful and positive in speech and manner, they do not work in a vacuum. The congregational personality pattern, built up over many decades through the repeated modeling and habit patterns of policy leaders and program leaders—and sometimes by previous pastor-leaders—significantly influences the level of hopefulness and optimism among the members.
- (1) Another study indicates that optimism levels differ due to regional and/or community circumstances: People who live in the Midwest, for example, are less optimistic than people who live in the Sunbelt South. People who live in central cities and in small towns distant from metropolitan areas have more negative moods.
 - (2) Generally speaking, agricultural communities whose farmers depend on irrigated water are more optimistic than communities whose farmers are solely dependent for crop production on the far less dependable water source of rainfall (whose sparseness creates economic largess some years and economic ruin other years).
 - (3) These factors mean that a congregation’s sociological makeup influences its optimism levels. Thus, pastors in some churches must work twice as hard at helping to increase the optimism level than leaders in other congregations.
- H. Celebrate every success, even small ones. Celebrations tend to counterbalance the natural inclination of people in small churches to feel pessimistic about their congregation’s future.

Study/Discussion/Planning Session #3

PEP Team Member: Prepare for your PEP Team's discussion session by making notes in the margins, especially with regard to questions such as the following.

1. Do you recall instances where this paragraph or section was true in your personal experience and/or in a congregation?
2. What would you like to add or subtract from this paragraph or section?
3. In what ways does the idea in this section or paragraph seem true of our congregation?
4. What suggested methods from this section or paragraph should we consider using in our congregation?

PEP Team Discussion Leader: As you move through this discussion session, ask PEP Team members to take turns sharing their answers to the above questions.

Turnaround Strategy #9: Develop planning procedures that match your congregation's size.

- A. One of the major blocks to a positive future is resistance to change.
- B. Without effective annual planning procedures, small churches tend to keep on operating in a rearview mirror mode by "repeating what we did last year" with slight variations.
- C. Dorothy McRae-Mahon developed one of the best "annual planning day" formulas available. The ten steps create an excellent involvement/brainstorming/focusing procedure. Schedule this on Sunday afternoon and early evening, or on Saturday morning ending with lunch, or starting with lunch on Saturday and running through the late afternoon, or on Saturday afternoon through evening, with a meal as the "break time." In other words, whenever you do it, remember that small churches are like families: they are at their best when they eat together.

Outline:

- (1) Brief worship.
- (2) Ask people to write down three things in the church that they want to celebrate about the past year and three things they wish had turned out better.
- (3) After everyone in the room has done that, list these on newsprint at the front of the room.
- (4) Sing a song of celebration for the items you want to celebrate.
- (5) Offer a prayer of absolution for the disappointments. [This is a brilliant strategy. When things go wrong in small churches, members tend "bronze" that failure, set it on the mantle, and remind one another of it for the next thirty years. This step in McRae-Mahon's planning process creates an annual funeral service for failures, helping people to disentangle from and move beyond them.]
- (6) Ask people to write down three things they would like to see happen next year.
- (7) Arrange these items under headings such as property, Sunday school, fellowship, etc.
- (8) Give these items to the various committees that logically have responsibility for them, and ask the committees to spend two hours working on the items they feel should be achieved this year. [In many small churches, committees exist only on the organizational chart and/or in its leaders' imaginations. In operational reality, many small churches do not have committees; they have committee *chairpersons* who call 90 percent of the shots. However, in this annual planning session, most of the committee members are present, giving some substance to the terms "representative democracy" and "participatory democracy."]
- (9) Report back to the entire group and send any needed policy decisions to the appropriate policy-making group in your church.
- (10) Print the plan in a booklet for use by leaders during the year. [Printing it is crucial. This creates "authority" for all the leaders, especially for the pastor. People believe much more of what they see in print than what they hear someone say. Throughout the year, when members ask, "Why we are doing this?" the pastor can say, "The congregation decided that at the annual planning conference. You may remember reading it in the minutes of that meeting."]

- D. Use every possible means to shift the church’s personality from introverted to extroverted thinking and behavior. The method Steve Bierly used at Cobblestone Reformed Church, Schenectady, New York, is an example.
- When I arrived at Cobblestone, one of the first things my wife and I did was to host two “Listening Dinners” each week, for three months. (We went through the church list and attempted to invite everyone to a dinner.)
 - I kept the board informed as to what the people were saying. We also printed comments from the dinners in our monthly newsletters. I highlighted ideas that tied in with my desire for church growth.
 - Eventually, we created the “Cobblestone Commission” as a summary paper and outreach plan that we gave to all the members.
 - Why has Cobblestone been able to do so much evangelistically in less than a year? I was able to say, “Several people in the congregation want to see us use more praise worship music” and “Many of our members would love to see us doing something for growth.” Since members and leadership had already seen these suggestions in the newsletter and had been updated in board meetings, I did not have to say, “As your new pastor, I believe that we need to be doing thus-and-so, etc.”
 - Remember that repetition, repetition, repetition—printing and reprinting and reminder excerpts from processes of this sort—increases the likelihood that changes happen with fewer conflicts.
- E. Leaders in small congregations benefit from reviewing and considering how to implement the twenty-point strategy on pages 63-84 of the book by Steven E. Burt and Hazel Ann Roper titled *The Little Church that Could: raising small church esteem* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press).
- F. *Bringing Your Church Back to Life: Beyond Survival* by Daniel Buttry (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press) outlines a step-by-step procedure that combines prayer and pastoral leadership.

Turnaround Strategy #10: Institute an annual stewardship emphasis that helps people focus on the biblical, spiritual-growth value of financial giving. Money is the issue small-church leaders say they do not want to talk about, but they often talk about it more than anything else, especially when they consider doing something new. Financial stewardship is the most easily solved problem any small church faces; yet it is the problem most of the members believe cannot be solved.

- A. Strong financial stewardship is important for two reasons:
- (1) It helps individuals grow spiritually.
 - (2) It powers the congregation’s ministries.
- B. Few factors produce greater feelings of positive future in small congregations than resolving persistent financial problems through an effective annual stewardship program that teaches biblical principles such as “the need of the giver to give for his or her own spiritual benefit,” not just the church’s need to pay its bills.
- Yet most small congregations use stewardship methods that limit rather than encourage financial giving; thus, also limiting the individual member’s spiritual-growth opportunities.
 - George Barna writes that 83 percent of clergy and church leaders say they need information regarding how to motivate greater financial generosity among church members.
- C. National research has definitively answered the question, “What causes high-per-capita giving to congregations?” The paragraphs below summarize that data.

Churches across the United States ask people to contribute money in three different ways:

■ *One kind of church takes offerings:* They have no annual financial stewardship campaign. People in those congregations give an average of 1.5 percent of their income to support their church.

■ *Researchers call the second kind of congregation a pledging church:* The leaders build a proposed budget each year, then ask people to write on a pledge card the dollars per week or per month they plan to give, and turn in the card during an annual stewardship campaign. People in pledging congregations give an average of 2.9 percent of their income to their church. In other words, people who write their financial commitments on paper give, on average, twice as much as people who do not write their intentions on paper.

■ *Researchers call the third kind of congregation a percentage-giving church:* Instead of building a proposed budget, those churches conduct an annual stewardship campaign that asks people, “What percentage of your income do you feel God is calling you to give?” Parishioners then translate their answers into dollar amounts, write the figure on a card, and turn it in. The church creates the budget by totaling the cards and adding to that figure the totals from regularly giving parishioners who did not sign a card, plus any regular incomes from other sources (such as building rental fees). People in percentage-giving congregations contribute an average of 4.6 percent of their income to their church. In other words, national research indicates that people whose churches repeatedly raise the question, “What percentage of your income is God calling you to give?” contribute three times more dollars per year than people whose churches only take offerings. (Dean R. Hoge, Charles Zech, Patrick McNamara, and Michael J. Donahue, *Money Matters* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox])

■ Among Protestants, people who attend churches with fewer than 100 members give, on average, 2.3 percent of their incomes to God’s work through their congregation. People who attend churches with more than 1,000 members give, on average, 3.7 percent. The major reason for that difference: small churches typically do not schedule an effective annual stewardship campaign.

Annual stewardship programs that achieve the highest per-capita giving levels emphasize the following principles:

- A. Effective annual stewardship programs talk about need of the giver to give for his or her spiritual benefit, not the need of the church to receive.
- B. Instead of asking, “What does the church need to balance its budget?” effective annual stewardship programs ask, “What is God calling you to give as a percentage of your income?”
- C. Effective annual stewardship programs talk about tithing and percentage-giving, not as a legalism but as an appropriate faith commitment for which God’s grace empowers us. This makes the giving of money a spiritual issue that fits the different income levels of each household.
- D. Effective annual stewardship programs complete the annual stewardship campaign first, before they establish and publish the church budget. Publishing the budget first puts a lid on the giving, as individuals calculate “my fair share” of the anticipated budget increase and tend to increase their giving only a dollar or two a week. By contrast, asking, “What percentage of your income is God calling you to give?” builds a biblical foundation on which much higher percentage-increases appear.
- E. Effective annual stewardship programs talk about time and talent stewardship during a different month than they schedule the annual financial campaign. When you talk for these gifts simultaneously, some people treat them like a multiple-choice question and respond, “I can’t afford to give much money, but I can give time.” This is not a biblically-based choice. Do not give people the opportunity to make that kind of decision.

Small congregations, because most of them do not use effective annual stewardship campaigns,

hold down both the spiritual-growth opportunities of members and the financial support of congregational mission and ministries. Discover the total of all giving to all causes in your congregation during last year. Divide that dollar amount by the average morning worship attendance reported to your denomination last year. Many small churches find that figure is about \$1,000 per-worship-attendee per year, and in some small churches the figure is as low as \$700 per-worship-attendee per year.

Why is this figure important? In the average midsize and large congregation in the United States, that computation equals \$1,300.00 to \$1,600.00 per-worship-attendee per year and sometimes rises as high as \$3,400.00 per year.

What makes the difference in the average giving levels of congregations? Not the median income of the county. Not even the median income of the congregation. The only significant correlation factor is whether the congregation has an effective annual stewardship campaign. If it doesn't, giving is low and the leaders always find themselves operating with insufficient financial resources. Thus, most small congregations unknowingly operate their church \$10,000 or \$20,000 or \$40,000 below the giving potential of their members.

Ironically, the leaders in many small congregations defend themselves against having an effective annual stewardship campaign by repeatedly saying, "We do not want to talk about money in our church!" The result: They talk about money all the time. They discuss it at every meeting, especially when creative ideas come up. "We just don't have the money to do that!"

Wise leaders in small congregations reverse this habit. They talk about money four weeks out of each year, during their annual stewardship campaign. Thus, they do not need to talk about money the other forty-eight weeks of the year.

What time of year should churches conduct their annual stewardship campaign? Research across the United States indicates the following "time of year" pattern:

- 68 percent of congregations conduct their campaign in September, October, or November.
- 27 percent of congregations conduct their campaign in December, January, or February.
- 3 percent of congregations conduct their campaign in March, April, or May.
- 2 percent of congregations conduct their campaign in June, July, or August.

Leaders in most churches feel that fall, as minds move toward Thanksgiving weekend, is a logical time for these campaigns, as we see from the above statistics. The time of year is not, however, the secret to success. The secret is an effective annual stewardship program that openly and effectively teaches the spiritual-growth value of giving a percentage of your income to the Lord's work through your congregation.

The following annual stewardship programs use the principles outlined above and have the best statistical track records of any stewardship programs in any denomination in the United States:

© *New Consecration Sunday, 2007 Revised Edition, Stewardship Program with Guest Leader Guide and CD-ROM* by Herb Miller (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007)—ISBN 798-0-687-64437-7—available through www.cokesbury.com or at Cokesbury Bookstores or by phoning 800/672-1789.

Thousands of congregations in 25 denominations have reported (a) 15 percent to 30 percent increases in total congregational giving the first year and (b) 10 percent to 15 percent increases in total giving during each of seven or more subsequent years of use.

In one congregation, financial giving increased 25 percent the first year, 18 percent the second year, and 30 percent the third year. The congregation's financial secretary said, "Three reasons produced these annual increases. Firstly, virtually no households lower their giving during the annual campaign. Secondly, between 66 percent and 88 percent of the households make some degree of annual increase. Thirdly, four-to-six new households decided to tithe each year we used *Consecration Sunday*. These households, some of which grew from giving 4 percent of their income to giving 10 percent of their income, were a major

part of our enormous annual increases.”

The *2007 Revised Edition* provides (a) a user-friendly CD that contains an audio overview, a downloadable PowerPoint presentation, and several printed letters for congregational use; (b) greater clarity in how-to instructions; and (c) information regarding a free on-line service for guest leaders who wish to e-mail questions to Herb Miller. The program unfolds during four weeks of multifaceted communication and a concluding worship service.

© *Grow One Sunday* by Herb Miller (Nashville: Abingdon Press, download from www.cokesbury.com)

© *Effective Stewardship: Building on Biblical Principles* (Belleville, Illinois, KLV Enterprises), Obtain a free CD and explanation materials by visiting the www.klventerprises.com Internet site. This year-around tithing emphasis works well in churches whose leaders steadfastly resist annual stewardship campaigns.

Warning: Effective stewardship programs in small congregations do not ask members to visit other members’ homes and ask them to complete a pledge card in their living room. That method, sometimes used in large churches and/or in capital campaigns to raise money for building construction, produces negative emotional results in small churches, and negative results in churches of every size in small towns. None of the effective annual stewardship program methods listed above use that approach.

How can we handle the crisis of a financial shortfall at midyear? This often happens when congregations fail to conduct effective annual stewardship campaigns. Churches can address this midyear problem in one of these ways:

- A. Ask the finance committee to lead us in a one-month “tithing” emphasis. Example: Ask people to trust God with their finances by giving one-tenth of their income during the month of June.
- B. After determining the exact total of the financial shortfall, announce that figure and ask people to respond with special gifts “over-and-above” their regular June giving.
- C. After determining the exact total of the financial shortfall, announce that figure and ask people to respond with a sacrificial, “over-and-above” gift of an additional 10 percent beyond the total amount they had planned to give for the present calendar year.

How can we handle a year-end shortfall? Some congregations find value in a “thirteenth-month campaign” that invites people to consider doubling their December offering “so we can finish the year in the black, with all bills paid.”

Turnaround Strategy #11: Expand the geographical reach of your parish to fifteen miles in every direction, instead of three-to-five miles. In earlier decades, small-town businesses and small-town churches typically reached three-to-six miles. Then Wal-Mart appeared and began reaching fifteen-to-forty miles in all directions.

- Likewise, congregations of every size now provide spiritual enrichment to people from a much larger geographical area than in 1950. In the typical congregation, attendees come from a circle whose radius is fifteen minutes driving distance in every direction. Not only is Jesus’s statement that the fields are white to harvest still true (John 4:35); God has added enormous acreage to each of the fields.
- Small churches cannot compete with the variety of programming that mega-churches offer; however, effective small churches have a far larger territory from which to draw attendees than they did only a few decades ago. These larger horizons create greater opportunities for filling the ministry niche that serves the people who seek the family-type relationships that small churches offer.

Turnaround Strategy #12: Encourage the pastor to develop strong people-skills that include

warmth, affirmation, shepherding, and flexibility. Examples of people-skills among pastors in effective small-membership churches:

- A. Affirmation is more than an attitude. Affirmation is an action-pattern that includes the following behaviors:
 - Learn about, affirm, and appreciate the church's unique culture and history, its "story."
 - Identify and affirm the church's cherished "annual events," especially in small-town and rural churches.
 - Affirm and appreciate the church's family qualities.
 - Affirm and appreciate the church's present leaders, and maintain emotional contact with the matriarchs and patriarchs, especially during times when major changes are under consideration.
- B. Hear the members' three unspoken questions to every stranger, including a new pastor, noted by Steve R. Bierly in *Help for the Small Church Pastor* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan):
 - Are you going to disturb our family?
 - Are you going to change our traditions?
 - Are you going to usurp power from our leaders?
- C. Understand that people in small churches, especially in small towns, respect community institutions, traditions, and individuals more than they respect great ideas and programs that the pastor and/or lay leaders devise.
 - What happens if members feel that respect for a tradition or a person (even when that person is far less than perfect) is at odds with a great idea or program?
 - The members' respect for the tradition or the person always gets more allegiance.
- D. Understand that people in small churches are much more easily motivated to accomplish *specific projects* than to set and work toward *long-term goals*.
 - Projects tend to unite the congregation. Trying to set goals often lead to controversy and thus tends to divide the congregation.
 - Yes, church leaders should have goals in their head and heart. But use a series of projects to help the church arrive at those goals.
- E. Systematically pray for people. Using the list of church households, pray for each individual in five different families each day. Praying for people by name, in addition to helping those people address their life challenges, increases your sensitivity to their feelings and needs.
- F. To counterbalance your tendency to spend more time with a short list of people because (1) they are quite active in leadership roles and/or (2) they meet your personal emotional needs and/or (3) they are more fun to visit with, develop systematic ways to express respect and concern for every household and individual. Examples:
 - Use the phone a great deal. When you feel God's urging, which often happens during your prayer time, call and say, "I haven't had a chance to visit with you for a while, so I thought I'd check in and see how you are doing."
 - One pastor found that a birthday card to each member communicated effective pastoral care and concern.
 - Another pastor carefully notes the date of significant losses, such as the death of a spouse, and telephones that individual on the first anniversary of the death to say, "I knew this would be a difficult day for you," and listens to the person's feelings.
- G. Visit all of the households at least once during the first year, preferably during the first several months. This establishes your reputation as a caring pastor. Before you start, ask a long-term leader to help you code a household membership list. Use the following codes:
 - "A" equals attends every Sunday.

- “B” equals attends a couple of times a month.
 - “C” equals attends a few times each year.
 - “D” equals attends at Christmas and Easter.
 - “E” equals have not attended for several years.
 - To save your time and theirs, and to make the visit feel more important, telephone ahead for an appointment. Initially, wanting to “stop by and get acquainted” is your reason for visiting. Later in your pastoral tenure, saying, “I haven’t had a chance to visit with you for awhile” is the reason for your visit.
 - Initially, start with the “A” list, especially the people on the “A” list born before 1946, since most people in that group have higher expectations regarding pastoral visitation. Why start with this “A” group? They quickly spread the word across the congregational grapevine that you are a caring pastor.
 - Do the “B” list second, and so forth. Leave the “E” list until last.
- H. If the church is in a small town that has a local gathering place—which may be at a coffee shop or a truck stop near the interstate—the pastor should show up there for a few minutes at the time each morning when the largest number of “locals” gather. Be friendly and interested in learning what is going on with people and in the community. Two cautions: Don’t linger too long, or you appear lazy. Don’t forget to leave a tip.
- I. Especially in small towns and rural areas, don’t evaluate this community and its people by the values and standards of behavior you brought with you, especially if this is a small, rural town and you grew up in a metropolitan area. See this as a cross-cultural experience in much the same way as you would if you went to an African community as a missionary and were attempting to understand its culture, values, and behaviors. If you did not grow up in a small town, what you are tempted to view as negative in some small towns may merely be different.
- J. A major challenge for the pastor in a small church is learning how to serve as a chaplain to volunteers—most of whom operate as individuals, even when they chair committees. The small church is at that awkward place on the spectrum where the pastor must lead while appearing to be a chaplain who follows the leadership of the lay policy- and program-leaders. This necessitates a far higher level of leadership skill in pastors than they realize they need when they first enter their role. One pastor puts it this way: “If this church is a ship, my role as pastor is not to have a hand on the tiller steering its course, but rather a seat in the crow’s nest looking for dangers and opportunities.” Some excellent resources:
- *Turnaround Strategies for the Small Church*, Ron Crandall (Nashville: Abingdon Press)
 - *The Lord’s Harvest and the Rural Church*, Kent R. Hunter (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press)

Study/Discussion/Planning Session #4

PEP Team Member: Prepare for your PEP Team’s discussion session by making notes in the margins, especially with regard to questions such as the following.

1. Do you recall instances where this paragraph or section was true in your personal experience and/or in a congregation?
2. What would you like to add or subtract from this paragraph or section?
3. In what ways does the idea in this section or paragraph seem true of our congregation?
4. What suggested methods from this section or paragraph should we consider using in our congregation?

PEP Team Discussion Leader: As you move through this discussion session, ask PEP Team members to take turns sharing their answers to the above questions.

Turnaround Strategy #13: Fine-tune your worship service toward a blended format, style, and hymn selection that shows equal respect for the spiritual preferences of all four adult generations.

Leaders in many small congregations do not recognize that a major cause of their attendance decline is the exclusive use of worship style and hymns that spiritually fed young adults during the 1940s and 1950s but do not spiritually connect with of the majority of young-adult families in the 2000s era. When young-adult worship visitors (age eighteen to forty-four) feel that a congregation’s worship services are boring, irrelevant, emotionally flat, and do not communicate in ways that connect with their spiritual needs, they judge those worship services an irrelevant waste of time and decide to shop elsewhere for a church home.

This is a complex period of history for pastors, worship leaders, and musicians. As churches did during the decades following 364 A.D. and 1517 A.D.—the first two major worship-style shifts in Christian history—every congregation in the United States is transitioning through major changes in worship-style preferences. Effectively navigating your way through those changes is a primary predictor of your congregation’s health and vitality two decades from now, because it adds sufficient numbers of age-eighteen-to-forty-four, young-adult households to create the next generation of church leaders.

Worship Style Transition #1: Generally speaking, people born before 1946 define spiritually meaningful worship with the word “meditation.” Generally speaking, people born after 1945 define spiritually meaningful worship with the word “celebration.” Therefore, the majority of pre-1946-birthdate adults who attend an exclusively celebration-style service want more time to meditate. They prefer the use of traditional liturgies, creeds, and slow hymns popular in the meditation-style era of their young adulthood. Likewise, the majority of post-1946-birthdate adults who attend an exclusively meditation-style service say it feels like a funeral. They want more fast-paced hymns and a sense of joy. If they are shopping for a church home, they decide to keep on shopping. *Starting Gate Clue:* If you want a joyful, celebrative service, do not ask a low-energy person to give the words of welcome and greeting. When that happens, many young-adult worshipers get a depressive, downer feeling and carry it throughout the rest of the service. *Another Clue:* The type and tempo of the opening hymn sets the mood on meditative or celebrative for most of the young-adult worshipers.

Worship Style Transition #2: The challenge of leading worship services in which all four adult generations find spiritual meaning is even more formidable because they favor four different kinds of congregational hymns. Research indicates that people “bond” to music, both sacred and secular, between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four, which explains the following music preferences. Research indicates that 66 percent of worshipers forty or more years of age prefer the old gospel hymns (most of which were written between 1870 and 1935) or the older, traditional hymns such as “The Church’s One Foundation” and the Wesley hymns (written between 1520 and 1870)—which means that 33 percent of that age group prefers contemporary praise songs. By contrast, fewer than 20 percent of worshipers younger than age forty prefer traditional hymns; these younger adults prefer contemporary hymns and praise songs. Within that

younger-adult age group, people born after 1980 prefer contemporary praise songs that were composed since 1980 and have an even faster tempo than the praise songs composed 1960-1980.

Worship Style Transition #3: To make the challenge of leading effective worship services even more complicated, the communication style by which effective worship leaders transmit information and inspiration is entering its third era. From the time of Christ to A.D. 1500, worship was in the “oral and visual era.” Few people could read and write. They memorized the hymns. They memorized the creeds and recited them in unison. Information and learning was “mouth to ear” and “symbol to eye.” Through the symbolism of statues, stained glass windows, and the architecture of cathedrals, worship leaders transmitted and spiritually nurtured Christian faith.

Invention of the printing press in the mid-1400s launched the “print era” of worship, which ran from 1500 to 1950. Hymn words were printed on paper (hymnbooks did not include musical notes until about 1855), along with responsive readings and the creeds. Most Christian information and learning was transmitted by “reading and reciting” rather than through memorization and symbols.

Beginning in the 1950s, Christian communication entered the “broadcast era.” People who grew up watching television screens find it is more natural to receive information visually than by reading and reciting. Thus, they feel more comfortable receiving information and doing much of their learning through a combination of oral, visual, and symbol presentations on screens instead of in a solely oral or print format. They tend to listen with their eyes and think with the feelings that result from both seeing and hearing information, rather than hearing alone.

This, of course, explains why screens are going up in church sanctuaries in every part of the country in all denominations. This also explains why some experts predict that denominations will not print many more hymnbooks (except for use by the organists, pianists, instrumentalists, choirs, and vocalists), replacing hymnbooks with electronic disks that provide a far wider range of music in a convenient, easy-to-use format that worshipers can read on projection screens.

How Can Churches Address the Three Worship-Style-Transition Challenges? To avoid one of the following negative outcomes, (1) alienating the older adults or (2) gradually shrinking in membership over the next decade, small congregations must show equal respect for the spiritual needs of all four adult generations.

Community size makes a difference in how churches can address these challenges: In large cities, one and sometimes two congregations in every mainline denomination can disregard the observations in the paragraphs above, without gradually declining in membership. These one or two congregations thrive by meeting the worship preferences of that tiny percentage of age-eighteen-to-forty-four young adults who like exactly the same kind of meditative worship style and hymns as young adults liked during the 1920s or the 1940s and 1950s. However, mainline congregations in small towns gradually shrink in membership if they offer only gospel and traditional hymns, due to the small percentage of adults in the general population with that preference.

Congregational size makes a difference in how churches can address these challenges: Churches with fewer than 150 in average worship attendance, almost never succeed in establishing a “contemporary” worship service on Sunday morning. They can, however, build a positive future by meeting the spiritual needs of all four adult generations in one “blended” service.

An Effective “Blended” Format for Small Congregations: Begin the service with informal announcements and include a brief time in which worshipers greet one another (research indicates that 85 percent of United States congregations now practice this friendliness ritual in their worship services). Follow those informal moments with a medley of three or four “praise songs,” using selections from both “early contemporary” and “late contemporary” every Sunday. These songs promote spiritual focus and God-centered worship. They meet the spiritual needs of younger adults in the same way that the “old

gospel songs” did for young adults between 1870 and 1935. In many congregations, a praise team of four-to-six youth or adults, in most instances using musical instruments, leads this opening section of worship.

†To summarize this format, the service flows from warm, “informal moments” that include announcements, to eight minutes of “celebration moments” using contemporary praise songs, to the more “formal, meditative time” that includes more “meditative moments” and hymns from the gospel and traditional eras during the remainder of the service (with hymns led by the chancel choir and music director). In other words, the overall “flow” of the service is from informal to contemporary to traditional. Unfold the various parts of the service in the same progressive order each week, but the manner in which you accomplish each worship element can differ. For example, leaders can do calls to worship, prayers, and Bible readings in several ways. That variety increases inspiration while reducing boredom.

†As you shift to the systematic use of all four hymn types every Sunday, as suggested above, print something like the following in your morning worship bulletin every Sunday for at least six months: “Every Sunday, our congregation strives to show equal respect for the spiritual preferences in worship hymns of all four generations. Therefore, each week we select worship hymns and praise songs that speak to each of those four generations. (A practical way to identify those four hymn types is their copyright dates. Traditional: 1520-1870. Gospel: 1871-1935. Early Contemporary: 1961 to 1980. Late Contemporary: 1981-present.)”

†As you use the two or three contemporary praise songs, avoid singing a chorus over more than once. Older adults find repetitive choruses boring because people of their age draw primary meaning from the *content of the words*, whereas younger adults draw primary meaning from the *feeling of the music* and thus do not find repetitive singing of the choruses boring. To obtain the current list of the most popular contemporary songs used in churches across the United States, contact Christian Copyright Licensing, Inc. at www.ccli.com/WorshipResources/Top25.cfm which updates the list every six months.

Qualities Often Observed in Blended Worship Services: Like traditional services (1955 style mainline denominations), blended services do not follow one standard format. Different congregations use different elements. However, blended services often feature the following components:

- ☉ The service begins with high-energy participation of worshipers, rather than quiet, meditative involvement.
- ☉ The hymn-singing tempo is faster than was typical during the 1950s.
- ☉ An inexpensive copyright license from Christian Copyright Licensing, Inc. (www.ccli.com) permits printing hymns and choruses in bulletins or projecting them on overhead screens.
- ☉ The presence or absence of a projection screen is not the crucial ingredient in defining a “blended” worship service. An excellent blended service is possible by printing the hymn words on a worship bulletin insert. The crucial issue is whether we sing all four hymn types every Sunday morning!
- ☉ Fewer printed prayers and responsive readings provide a more informal flow and feel.
- ☉ Casual attire is accepted and encouraged among worshipers.

Should a small congregation use a blended service, even if no young adults attend at the present time? That depends on whether you want your church to live or die. Without blended hymn-singing, most young adults who visit the worship service for the first time make that visit their last appearance. To most young adults, the slow-cadence hymns composed 1517 to 1870 make them feel like they are attending a funeral service. One young father, when asked why his family did not attend a particular congregation (of the denomination in which he grew up), said, “I don’t mind attending a funeral service once in a while; I just don’t want to attend fifty-two of them a year on Sunday mornings.”

Churches that plan to be alive two decades from now behave as if young adults are in every service. Otherwise, they will *never* have a permanent group of young adults in the service. Thus, when the present members “get their promotions” during the next few decades, they leave behind an empty church building.

How to make transitions in worship style, content, format, and hymn type: Appoint a four-person transition team (representative of the three adult generations mentioned above) that meets with the pastor and music leaders for one hour each week for the first four months to (a) critique last week's worship service, (b) finalize the format of next Sunday's service, including hymn selection, and (c) brainstorm music possibilities for future Sundays.

Remember that a complete transition—from the period during which long-term members refuse to use praise songs in worship to the time when they say, “We have *always* done it that way here!” typically takes up to seven years. Shifting congregational hymn-preference is a process, never an event.

Turnaround Strategy #14: Develop systematic procedures for extending friendliness toward first-time worship visitors. Friendliness is more than an attitude. Friendliness is actions such as the following:

☀ At a governing board meeting or some gathering in which numerous church leaders are present, ask people to take responsibility for greeting and getting acquainted with newcomers seated on their pew and the two pews immediately in front of them before or after the service. Do NOT print this instruction in the bulletin. Friendliness should be spontaneous, not institutional.

☀ To obtain names and addresses of first-time worship visitors in congregations that average fewer than seventy in worship attendance, pew pads and cards work less well than this formula: Ask two extroverted members who are virtually always in worship to informally talk with each newcomer before or after the service. In that conversation, one of those long-term members says, “Would you mind giving me your address and phone number? We would like to mail you some information about your church.”

☀ Make three kinds of contacts in three different ways by three different people during the first six days:

- The first contact should be some form of home visit within thirty-six hours. The objective is a front-door visit only, in which the lay caller says, “We appreciate you being in our worship service last Sunday” and hands them some cookies or a church-logo coffee cup and information about your church (copy of your newsletter and, if you have one, a small brochure that describes your congregation). In cases where people absolutely *insist* that you come in, this is a not-more-than-fifteen-minute-in-the-living-room conversation (therefore, do not send laypersons that are incapable of conducting a *brief* conversation).
- The second contact should be a letter or handwritten note from the pastor, mailed on Monday.
- Make the third contact the following Saturday. A layperson telephones worship visitors to express appreciation for their worship attendance last Sunday and say, “I thought I’d give you a call and get acquainted.” The *same* layperson makes all of those Saturday telephone calls, every week. That layperson should *not* be one of the people who made the home visit within thirty-six hours. Why does this work so well? It sends a strong friendliness signal. Though the matter is never mentioned in the phone conversation, it is obvious that this person or household is *not* out of town this weekend. When do church shoppers decide where to attend worship next Sunday? Not on Wednesday! Not before Saturday afternoon, sometimes not before Sunday morning. *Clue:* It is easier to revisit a church that you already know is friendly. (A psychologist says that the first visit within thirty-six hours is “positive reinforcement for behavior” and the telephone call on Saturday is “a prompt that encourages behavior.”)
- Systematically accomplishing these three contacts with every first-time worship visitor in the first six days increases the number of first-time visitors who eventually become regular worshipers and members of your church each year from the national average of 10 percent to at least 20 percent (a few churches achieve 30 percent).
- Why are these contacts so powerful? They strongly and clearly communicate a “welcome home friendliness,” which research indicates is among the most powerful first steps in moving people toward God and the desire to participate in your congregation. Details for developing these

procedures and a “Visit the Visitors Team” are found in *How to Transform Worship Visitors into Regular Attendees* by Herb Miller (download free of charge at www.TheParishPaper.com).

- Following the initial front-door visits, providing the worship visitors still seem like people who may return for another visit, add them to your church newsletter list. Leave them on the list until you learn that they have become regular attendees at another church. A huge number of people become “mental members” of a congregation months or years before they become actual members. Why? Even though they may continue to shop other churches they are forming an understanding of your church by regularly receiving the newsletter. What is a mental member? This is the same kind of person who lists your congregation at the hospital upon admittance. You do not know them; they may never have attended. They have developed the feeling, “If I ever attend church, that’s where I’ll go.” In the same way, non-church attendees sometimes decide to attend your congregation at a time of emotional crisis when they feel they need God. Why your church? Because they have become “mental members” due to receiving the newsletter.

☀Develop a system for follow-up contacts with persons who visit your congregation a second, third, and fourth time. Study the “Friendliness Team” concept in *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume I, How to Transform Worship Visitors into Regular Attendees* (download free at www.TheParishPaper.com). This ministry team consists of two people from each adult class or church organization such as the choir or women’s organization. The Friendliness Team meets monthly. The pastor distributes and reviews a list of names, addresses, and telephone numbers of repeat worship visitors. Warning: without the monthly meeting with the pastor, such teams fall apart in three months.

Turnaround Strategy #15: Develop systematic procedures that motivate members to invite friends, relatives, and acquaintances to your congregation’s worship service. More than 75 percent of new members visit worship the first time due to invitations from someone who worships in your congregation. Enlarging the number of members (a) who adopt the habit of inviting and (b) who increase the number of invitations they extend each month, significantly increases the number of first-time worship visitors.

☀Congregations gain significant numbers of first-time worship visitors by motivating their members to invite three people to Candlelight Christmas Eve Services. Two Sundays before a Christmas Eve candlelight service, print on church stationery a bulk of invitations to this special service. Three times the number of morning worship attendees is usually a sufficient number of cards. Place each invitation in a business-sized envelope. Print in large letters on the front “Personal Delivery Invitation.”

At an appropriate time in the morning worship service, the pastor asks worshippers to invite to the Christmas Eve candlelight service people they know who do not regularly attend church. The pastor says, “Tell them that our church is having a special Christmas Eve Service. Then say, ‘I thought you folks might enjoy it. Here is a Personal Delivery Invitation. I hope you can attend.’”

Following or during that explanation, the pastor asks the ushers to come forward and distribute the invitation bundles to each pew. Invite each worshipper to take three of the envelopes and hand them to people during the next few days.

☀During the week prior to every Easter Sunday and Candlelight Christmas Eve Service, consider mailing an invitation letter to everyone who has visited worship within the past year, even those who only visited once during the past twelve months. Example (used by permission):

Dear Friends,

I just wanted to take a moment to let you know that I’m thrilled you have been visiting with us at First Church! I hope you have felt right “at home” with us.

As you have discovered in your visits with us, First Church is an alive, exciting, caring, and growing congregation and we’d love to have you become a part of our Church Family. I certainly do not want to pressure you in any way. However, if you have reached that point in your life where

you know that First Church is where you want to make your church home, then this special season would be a great time to join.

The next two Sundays, Palm Sunday and Easter, are two of the most significant Sundays of the year for those of us within the Christian faith. This Sunday, Palm Sunday, begins Holy Week as we continue in our journey to the cross. And then, of course, the following Sunday is Easter as we celebrate the good news of the resurrection and what it means to us today. It is, indeed, a special time of the year, and it would be a wonderful time to join us as one of our newest members!

If there is any way I can be of assistance to you, don't hesitate to call on me. May you experience in your life the wonderful gift of God's saving grace offered to us on the cross, and the good news of the resurrection of Christ. I look forward to see you Sunday.

In Christ,
Dr. Jay Horton

☼ Small-town congregations may wish to experiment with distribution of “door knob hanger” invitations to everyone on their community during the pre-Christmas and pre-Easter weeks.

☼ Test some newspaper advertising! One source of commercially prepared newspaper ad mats is Church Ad Project (www.churchad.com). Run newspaper ads weekly for one month—perhaps during pre-Christmas or pre-Easter weeks—rather than once a month all year. The United Methodist Church's “Igniting Ministry” features advertising resources at www.mediawarehouse.ignitingministry.org that you can download it at no charge, or you can order items on CD at a low cost. The huge list of advertising options includes newspaper ads, direct mail, and door hangers.

Study/Discussion/Planning Session #5

PEP Team Member: Prepare for your PEP Team's discussion session by making notes in the margins, especially with regard to questions such as the following.

1. Do you recall instances where this paragraph or section was true in your personal experience and/or in a congregation?
2. What would you like to add or subtract from this paragraph or section?
3. In what ways does the idea in this section or paragraph seem true of our congregation?
4. What suggested methods from this section or paragraph should we consider using in our congregation?

PEP Team Discussion Leader: As you move through this discussion session, ask PEP Team members to take turns sharing their answers to the above questions.

Turnaround Strategy #16: Develop the highest possible quality of and attendance in elementary Sunday school classes. One of the most life-endangering situations for any small congregation is arrival at a year in which it has no children in the elementary Sunday school in the sixth grade and below. Many church health experts say that circumstance equals terminal illness for a small congregation. They say that no matter what the leaders do at that point, the congregation continues to decline in membership and eventually disappears. Why? Young-adult visitors with small children quickly learn that this church has no children's Sunday school classes. This leaves those young-adult parents with no choice. One of the principle reasons they attend church is so their children can attend Sunday school. Regardless of how friendly the congregation is and how much those young adults like the people who attend it, they feel compelled to look elsewhere for a church home, one that has elementary Sunday school classes.

Congregations that have only three or four children in their kindergarten-through-sixth-grade Sunday school are in waters nearly as dangerous. Here, also, many young parents who visit such churches feel that their children would have a less than optimum Christian education environment there.

How can congregations address those situations? The following method, developed for and in churches across the United States that had zero children in elementary Sunday school classes, was originally called, "Reinventing the Sunday School in Childless Churches." Using this method, one congregation that had no elementary Sunday school classes in March had twenty children in elementary Sunday school classes the following October. Other congregations use the same procedure to triple or quadruple the number of children in their too-small elementary classes.

Begin unfolding the following several-month strategy in the spring, pointing toward reigniting or significantly enlarging elementary Sunday school classes in September.

A Seven-Month Strategy: Accept the fact that zero-attendance Sunday schools do not grow incrementally. They cannot reinvent themselves by adding one or two students per month. The old adage "kids go where kids are" also applies in reverse: "Kids don't go where kids aren't." Building a Sunday school from nothing to something almost never happens one child at a time.

The only way to grow a zero-based Sunday school is through a "big bang" procedure in which three or four classes containing several children each are launched simultaneously. To get that kind of combustion, use the following formula.

Twelve Steps to Success: Reinventing lost Sunday school attendance does not happen by accident. Once people put their minds and shoulders to the wheel, God can provide providence. But God does not act until people make intentional efforts to do God's will. The following steps do not guarantee success. However, without intentional efforts of this kind, non-success consistently happens.

Step #1: February 1, present the plan to your church leaders in whatever way seems appropriate in your congregation. Tell parishioners the plan works but is a lot of work. Make sure that several of them prefer the effort

necessary to reinvent the Sunday school to slow congregational death. Some church leaders, when confronted with the two options, will say this plan takes too much effort. If that happens, forget the next eleven steps. Find a pastor who can enjoy the several years of pastoral-care ministry that precede the congregation's funeral.

Step #2: March 1, begin unfolding the plan to the congregation. Say something like the following. "Many of you feel you have done your time as Sunday school teachers. That may be true, but no one takes early retirement from Christian discipleship. Some of you have the gift of teaching. We'll be calling on you to help reinvent our Sunday school. This fall, right after Labor Day, we plan to launch four Sunday school classes—preschool, grades one and two, grades three and four, and grades five and six. That requires a team of four teachers and four assistant teachers. Ask yourself whether you feel God is calling you to serve on that team."

Step #3: March 1, ask members to commit themselves to daily prayer for God's power. Make the prayers specific. Ask people to pray that God will give us (a) twenty-four children present in elementary Sunday school the first Sunday after Labor Day and (b) a total fall enrollment of forty children. Prepare a simple prayer commitment card. Ask people to sign it on Sunday morning, then bring it forward and place it on the communion table as their final act of worship before the benediction.

Step #4: April 1, begin recruiting the eight-person teacher team. Four people teach the four classes. The other four people serve as assistant teachers. Meet with them and unfold the plan.

Step #5: May 1, begin developing the largest possible list of potential Sunday school students. Urge parishioners to provide children's names during morning worship and by every other means available. Since 40 percent to 50 percent of people in every community do not attend church, potential names abound. Ask people for them. Set a goal of six regularly attending students in each of the four classes (when they begin this fall) for a total of twenty-four children. To achieve that goal, you must gather the names and addresses of one hundred potential students in the preschool through sixth-grade age range. Have all of those names and addresses in hand by the end of June.

Step #6: After the July 4 weekend, mail a letter from the Sunday school superintendent to all prospective homes. Address the letter to the parents. Say that your church is organizing a new Sunday school class this fall for children Johnny's age (personalize each letter and use the child's name). In the letter say, "We want to invite Johnny to attend, but we want to be sure that is okay with you. Someone from our church will contact you later this summer to make sure we have your permission."

Step #7: During the last two weeks of July, organize members of the congregation to visit the potential students' homes. Do this from 4:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. on two consecutive Sundays. Come back to the church for coffee, refreshments, and sharing at 8:00 p.m. The callers, if possible, visit the homes of people they know. Their objective is to (a) get acquainted with the parents and (b) say, "This fall our church is organizing a new Sunday school class for children Johnny's age (or Jill's age). We want to invite him (or her) to attend. Is that okay with you?"

Step #8: The third week of August, mail another letter to potential attendee homes. Address it to each of the children whose parents gave their consent. If the home has more than one child, send each of them a personal letter. Wherever possible, ask a member of the congregation who knows a specific family member to write that letter. In other cases, ask the person who made the July visit to Johnny's home or Jill's home to write the letter. Provide the writers with a model letter to which they can add any personalized paragraphs they desire.

Step #9: The fourth week of August, the pastor sends a personalized letter to all the Johnnys and Jills. Introduce and praise the person who will teach their class. Remind students of the beginning date (first Sunday after Labor Day).

Step #10: The Tuesday evening after Labor Day, a telephone team telephones all the Johnnys and Jills. Remind them that the class starts next Sunday. Ask the parents whether the children need transportation. If possible, talk first to each child, then to one of the parents. Offer to pick up the child if transportation-needs become apparent. Make the telephone calls between 6:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. Schedule a meeting of the telephone team at the church at 8:30 p.m. for desert, coffee, and reporting in to each other.

Step #11: The Wednesday after Labor Day, the pastor writes a letter to all of the children contacted who responded in any kind of positive way. Even if they did not totally commit to being present, remind them of the class starting time this Sunday and the teacher's name. The pastor says that he or she will welcome them at the front door when they arrive and tell them the location of their classroom.

Step #12: The first Sunday after Labor Day, celebrate results in the morning worship service. Meet with the teacher team that Sunday afternoon to discuss any needs they are experiencing. Set up a system for sending personally handwritten notes to every absent student the next and subsequent Sundays.

Warning: This procedure works, but it demands much work. If the pastor does not plan to give it aggressive personal leadership, do not attempt it. If the pastor lacks “detail-leadership ability” (or no layperson is available to serve as detail superintendent), it cannot succeed.

Promise: You are reaching out to a generally responsive public. Research by the Gallup organization and others indicates that more than three-fourths of unchurched adults would like to see their children involved in religious education. This is a fertile field in which to sow seeds. Plant them with care.

Turnaround Strategy #17: Begin building the strongest possible junior high and senior high youth ministries. Youth groups are almost impossible to develop when regularly attending households contain no youth. An equally dependable principle says that children become one year older each year.

- A. Therefore, to build a strong junior-high youth ministry, start by building a strong elementary Sunday school through procedures outlined above.
- B. To build a strong high-school youth ministry, grow a strong junior high ministry.
- C. Study the principles and suggestions in *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 2, How to Grow Strong Youth Groups* (download free at www.TheParishPaper.com).
- D. Background checks on church workers (including volunteers who work with children and youth) are essential. Some district and regional denominational offices have contracts with a company that provides this service for all congregations of your denomination.

Turnaround Strategy #18: Start new adult groups and ministries that open more entry ports for age-eighteen-to-forty-four young adults. Look for ways to change the single-cell congregation into a multiple-cell church. Participation and acceptance/adoption of newcomers is often blocked by the invisible fact that few individuals can socially relate to more than about forty other people at one time. If a small church values offering Christ to the maximum number of people, the only way around that dilemma is to add more participation groups that attract and involve newer people.

- A. Small churches grow when they increase the quality and quantity of core ministries. Thus, each time a church adds a core ministry such as a new adult Sunday school class or a children’s choir, the likelihood of membership growth increases.
- B. Therefore, to grow a small church, add one new ministry, class, or group at a time and delegate it to volunteers. Be sure it is a unifying concern, not potentially divisive. Examples:
 - During spring or fall months, plan an eight-week “Parenting Skills” study/discussion group for sixteen young-adult parents from your congregation and community during the Sunday school hour. Use the steps in *Church Effectiveness Nuggets, Volume 11: How to Increase Adult Sunday School Attendance* (download free at www.TheParishPaper.com), plus videos on “parenting” from Focus on the Family (www.focusonthefamily.com) and invite specific young-adult couples and single parents from within your church and outside your church in the community. Remember that 61 percent of singles in the United States are single parents (*Harvard Management Update*, December 2000, p. 10).
 - Using the same how-to steps outlined in the material above, during the following spring or fall months, plan an eight-week “Marriage Relationship Skills” study/discussion group for sixteen young-adults from your congregation and community during the Sunday school hour.
 - Often, such study/ discussion groups blossom into a new adult Sunday school class. During the seventh week someone in the group spontaneously says, “This has been fun. We ought to study something else.” Anticipating that possibility, the teacher has a couple of ideas in mind and asks the group to select the one they want to study for the next eight weeks. If at the fourteenth week someone says, “This has been fun. We ought to study something else!” you know that a new adult class has spontaneously combusted.

- In any such study/discussion group, either the participants bond, or they do not bond. Some groups do and some groups do not. If the group is ever going to bond, that happens in six hours. Whether people are discussing something together an hour a week for six weeks or trapped in an elevator, if the group is going to bond, that happens in six hours.
 - If the bonding happens, declare your group a success. If, on the other hand, the group does not decide to “study something else,” declare the experience a success and schedule another one for next year. Either way, this is much better than trying to get an adult class started that ends up with only three or four regular attendees and refuses to grow, and you cannot figure out how to bury it with the dignity that avoids hurting the feelings of people who worked hard to make it happen.
- C. To increase their fellowship dynamic with and thus their magnetic attraction of young adults, some congregations have established a monthly (usually Saturday night) combination of food, fellowship, and recreation. To experiment with that approach, each of two or three young-adult couples invites one un-churched couple to a purely social get-together of some sort. If that experience works well, each of the church couples invites the same couples to another get-together the following month (asking each of those couples to invite another couple). If the group “gels,” which is never totally predictable, the nucleus that forms sometimes evolves into a monthly “Church Bunch” that eventually becomes the basis for a young-adult class or other ministries.

Turnaround Strategy #19: Emphasize concern for children through community service ministries.

Appoint a three-person task force to investigate the possibility of establishing a Mother’s Day Out, Parent’s Night Out, Home-Game Child Care (for small towns where football and basketball are high points of community focus), preschool, daycare, or some other ministry to young adults in your community.

If your community population is under 10,000, consider launching a Wednesday-after-school Kid’s Club for elementary children next September. In small towns, “Kid’s Clubs” often become a powerful magnet for attracting children and their parents. District or Regional denominational structures are often aware of congregations who have effective ministries of this type. Contact those congregations to see what has worked and has not worked for them in establishing and operating such a ministry.

Study/Discussion/Planning Session #6

PEP Team Member: Prepare for your PEP Team’s discussion session by making notes in the margins, especially with regard to questions such as the following.

1. Do you recall instances where this paragraph or section was true in your personal experience and/or in a congregation?
2. What would you like to add or subtract from this paragraph or section?
3. In what ways does the idea in this section or paragraph seem true of our congregation?
4. What suggested methods from this section or paragraph should we consider using in our congregation?

PEP Team Discussion Leader: As you move through this discussion session, ask PEP Team members to take turns sharing their answers to the above questions.

20. Repeatedly teach leaders the principles and methods for effectively handling differences of opinion and conflict. Conflict is a natural result of two or more people working on something together, as in a marriage. No church group can totally eliminate conflict, and small amounts of it enhance creativity. However, most people are about as eager to participate in a quarreling church as they are to put their hand in an electric blender. Congregations with quarreling patterns create an anti-magnetic atmosphere that repels borders as effectively as the boiling pitch with which merchant ships defended themselves against pirates.

Some churches suffer from one or the other, or both, of two classic conflict patterns—conflict between the pastor and members (which repeats itself pastor after pastor) or conflict between members and members (which keeps repeating itself regardless of who the pastor is). Either of these patterns can keep recurring for decades. The characters change, but they keep re-performing the same play.

Of the various conflict patterns, the “blaming syndrome,” especially when promoted by one or two over-controlling, dominating lay leaders, is the toughest challenge with which to deal. The habit of blaming rather than praising tends to produce one or more of the following destructive results:

- Frequent conflict over small issues
- Difficulty in getting people to assume offices and responsibilities in the church
- Reduction of creativity and innovation
- A series of short pastorates

Books such as the following are valuable for identifying and learning how to deal with difficult church members: *Congregational Fitness: Healthy Practices for Layfolk* by Denise W. Goodman (Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute) is an excellent study/discussion resource for governing boards. *The Care of Troublesome People* by Wayne E. Oates (Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute) provides helpful insights for clergy and lay leadership. *Creating a Healthier Church* by Ronald Richardson (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress) explains the nature of congregational patterns and how they tend to repeat themselves.

For the causes behind and procedures for dealing with a wide variety of “bent personalities” and congregational conflicts, see *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 3, How to Prevent and Resolve Congregational Conflict* (download free at www.TheParishPaper.com). In some congregations, the staff-parish relations committee schedules this study—in coordination with the governing board—and also uses it as part of a January orientation of new officers, committee chairpersons, and governing board members.

At every opportunity, affirm the following principles and practices:

☉ Say frequently and firmly, “Differences of opinion are acceptable in our congregation: the only unacceptable behavior here is unwillingness to discuss the underlying reasons for the differences of opinion.”

☉ Remind people that opinions not openly expressed tend to grow stronger and go underground where

they become impossible to deal with in constructive ways. Example: Following the strong remarks of a habitually dominating person at a board meeting, the chairperson wisely said, "Let's get several different opinions on the table so we can think about this issue as intelligently as possible." She patiently waited through ten seconds of silence. A normally timid person began to speak. The chairperson restrained the chronic dominator's motor-mouth while drawing out the thinking of several other board members. The chairperson kept repeating her plea, "Let's hear all of the opinions: That way, we can make a much better decision." Her courage and skill, repeated at every meeting, modified the over-controlling board member's behavior. The over-talking habit stopped working, so she stopped using it.

☉ Remind people that it is okay to confront; example: "I find it difficult when you . . ."

It is okay to contend, to set forth one's opinion clearly.

It is okay to disagree: "I see it rather differently from that."

It is okay to accentuate: "This is a major concern to me."

It is okay to indicate: "I can live with (this), but not with (that)."

It is okay to express concern, to state facts that document the existence of a problem.

It is okay to request: "May I ask that in the future you . . ."

It is okay to confess injury, to relate an event or remarks that caused pain.

☉ Remind people that it is *not* okay to condemn; example: "You have absolutely no business . . .!"

It is *not* okay to contrive, to line up political support for a position in an effort to control a decision.

It is *not* okay to discredit: "This is a stupid idea that will never work!"

It is *not* okay to exaggerate: "This is the worst I can imagine."

It is *not* okay to dictate: "You either do (this) or I will do (that)."

It is *not* okay to place blame and make generalizations that indict another person; sometimes you have the right to be angry but that does not give you the right to be cruel.

It is *not* okay to demand: "I'm telling you that from now on you had better . . .!"

It is *not* okay to inflict guilt or try to induce shame in another person for his or her conduct or words.

(Adapted from Keith Huttenlocker, *Conflict and Caring* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan], p. 73)

Turnaround Strategy #21: Encourage tolerance between the strong, opposite viewpoints of people born before and after 1946. The depression years of the 1930s are well known for having produced a generation of people which, throughout their lives, espoused financially conservative values.

- Less often recognized is the manner in which the life circumstances through which every generation passes during their late teens, 20s, and 30s shape the personal value systems by which they relate to and give time and energy to organizations such as civic clubs, corporations, and congregations.
- Two radically-contrasting value systems were forged by the national experiences of the generation that fought (or whose parents fought) World War II and the generation that fought (or whose parents fought) in Viet Nam. Examples:

People born *before* 1946 have a high commitment to and confidence in institutions. A chain of command in which they have no personal say is quite acceptable. Much of this attitude was shaped by the successful winning of World War II, one of the greatest institutional triumphs in history. These people are easily motivated by "duty," by "ought to," and by "should." Regardless of obvious flaws, they tend to maintain loyalty to their corporations, clubs, and congregations.

People born *after* 1946 have low confidence in institutions. They insist on having a say in major decisions of any group in which they participate. A chain of command works only when they have involvement and input into the process. Much of their opinion was shaped by the Vietnam War, one of the worst cases of institutional mishandling in history. They do not respond to "guilt" motivation. They are

motivated by things that make sense to them, not by what older church leaders say we “ought to do.” If an institution is not willing to meet their needs, they move to another job or to another congregation.

Those contrasting generational values influence adult thinking and behavior, not just in church participation but in every kind of community, civic, job, and corporate setting. Examples:

- People born prior to 1946 rally to the cry, “United we stand!” People born after 1946 are more likely to say, “Individually, I’ll decide!”
- When faced with an overwhelming obstacle, people born prior to 1946 are likely to feel and say, “Whatever it takes, we’ll get it done!” People born after 1946 are more likely to feel and say, “Whatever makes sense.”
- People born prior to 1946 are likely to say, “Meaning in life comes from commitment to great causes.” People born after 1946 are more likely to say, “Meaning in life comes from personal choices.”

Governing board members can better understand these differences by discussing the chapter that deals with this issue in *Church Personality Matters* by Herb Miller (St. Louis; Chalice Press).

Turnaround Strategy #22: Fine-tune your organizational structure. Organizational structures that fit a congregation’s size increase its mission and ministry effectiveness by (a) improving communication (b) encouraging the free flow of new ideas and creativity, (c) providing efficient, rapid decision-making in a spirit of participatory democracy, (d) reducing the likelihood of two or three change-resistant leaders and/or the pastor exercising veto power over congregational decision-making processes, (e) reducing the likelihood that laissez faire style leadership by committee chairpersons and/or the pastor can create a nonproductive, do-nothing congregational atmosphere, (f) holding conflict to a minimum, (g) increasing the spirit of congregational unity, and (h) enlarging the percentage of members/attendees involved in the various ministries.

Organizational structures *not* appropriate to a congregation’s size decrease its mission and ministry effectiveness by creating the following results: (a) poor communication among members, (b) inadequate flow of new ideas and creativity, (c) a short list of laypersons and/or the pastor make most of the decisions, (d) frequent exercise of veto power by two or three long-term, change-resistant leaders, creating the feeling that “a small cliché runs our church,” (e) several dysfunctional committees and/or ministries due to the laissez faire, do-nothing leadership style of some chairpersons and/or the pastor, (f) a painful sense of disunity among members, (g) high-levels of unproductive conflict among leaders, and (h) a short list of hard-working lay leaders who feel increasingly burned out while a large number of members “sit in the bleachers and watch” because they feel unneeded or unwanted.

Despite the fact that its leaders often think that their church’s organizational structure is dysfunctional, small-churches are often so addicted to a familiar pattern that they keep doing it “the way we have always done it” instead of changing to a system that works better but with which they are unfamiliar.

An effective organizational system in small congregations of fewer than 100 in average worship attendance uses the following procedures.

A. The governing board is an overall-policy body that meets four times a year *for one hour* (and in special called meetings, if needed). Governing board members are elected in the way normal to that denomination, with three-year rotating terms of office, sequenced so that one-third of the members go off each year and one-third come on. Chosen for their faithfulness and their wisdom, about one-third of the members should be long-term, highly respected, experienced leaders. Another one-third should have become members during the last five years. Another one-third should be people less than age forty-five.

The governing board members fulfill the classic functions of governing boards in churches. Those functions include receiving and approving reports from all committees, approving the annual budget upon recommendation of the finance committee, approving additional expenditures not covered by line items in

this year's annual budget upon recommendation of the finance committee, approving the sale of physical properties upon recommendation from the trustees/property committee, and approving the purchase of property upon recommendation of the trustees/property committee.

During the week prior to the governing board meeting, the church secretary mails each board member a copy of all the committees' minutes and recommendations from their last meeting. The board *only receives reports and considers recommendations* that are on paper and meet the mailing deadline. Major agenda categories for the board meeting include Action Items (decisions at this meeting), Information Items (reports from task forces and committees), and Discussion Items (no decisions at this meeting).

Effective governing boards respond to reports and requests in three ways: "yes," "no," and "please do some more work on this and bring it back to us again at our next meeting." Effective governing boards limit meetings to one hour because they know that longer meetings mean the board is consciously or unconsciously doing the work (or redoing the work) or either the strategic planning team or the individual committees.

Effective governing boards *respond* to reports and requests from the individual committees. Reversing that process with a date-sequence in which the board meets first and then the committees meet produces low participation in the committees and ministry teams because the board inevitably begins giving directions to the committees instead of receiving reports and recommendations from them.

B. The strategic planning team comprised of all the committee chairpersons meets six times a year to communicate, coordinate, calendar, and vision at a 6:00 p.m. sandwich supper one month prior to the six annual governing board meetings. This six-time-per-year meeting of chairpersons also keeps the governing board from trying to mingle policy-setting with strategic planning (which does not work).

Without a strategic planning team or its equivalent, where do church leaders have the forum in which to introduce and discuss seed-thought ideas that may or may not have value in the overall "big picture"? This strategic planning team also provides opportunity for the pastor to raise questions and make suggestions regarding "big picture issues" before the committees meet.

This meeting must occur on a different night from and on a date that precedes the governing board meeting. Having both meetings the same night gives the impression that both are policy groups, which eventually leads to a discontinuance of the strategic planning team and escalates complaints about "poor communication" and low participation levels of laypersons in the committees and ministry teams.

The Strategic Planning Team's meeting has four objectives—communicate, coordinate, calendar, and vision—and these unfold in the following order.

Communicate and Coordinate: As the meeting begins, each chairperson takes turns in the "spotlight seat" sharing their committee's plans for the next four months. The other chairpersons take turns asking clarification questions regarding those plans. This process sparks communication, creativity, and coordination in ways that do not feel highly structured.

To prepare for this section of the meeting, the pastor has established a file folder in the church office. As ideas for the various committees occur to him/her during the month, or arrive in the mail, the pastor throws those ideas into the file folder. The afternoon before this meeting, the pastor takes thirty minutes to organize those ideas he/she wants to pass along to committee chairpersons, in note-form on one sheet of note-pad paper. As the committee chairpersons take turns asking the chairperson in the spotlight seat agenda-related questions, the pastor participates by referring to his/her note sheet.

Why is this process helpful? One of the best ways to lead is to ask questions. An even better way to lead is to ask questions in the presence of several peers (other committee chairs). This saves the pastor tons of time in accomplishing his/her leadership role, compared to the procedure of telephoning chairpersons throughout the month with those ideas. This procedure is also much more creative because the individual chairperson instantly gets a feel for how this idea comes across to the other committee chairs. This creates

a natural interaction. The pastor participates, along with other chairpersons, in asking the committee chairperson questions regarding his/her committee agenda.

Calendar: Distribute a copy of the present church calendar for the next four months. Ask chairpersons whether they need to add items. Discussions that arise spotlight any pressure points and give each chairperson clues regarding when he/she needs to start planning for a particular calendar event. Because this calendaring process happens in the presence of other chairpersons, individual chairpersons feel more accountable than when the pastor alone tries to gently motivate/prod/coordinate/pressure them one at a time via telephone or other conversations. Like a good baseball team, chairpersons begin feeling accountable to one another, not just to the coach [pastor]. This process produces a superior team atmosphere and moral.

Vision: Taking turns, and requiring that *everyone* speak, go around the room and require every chairperson to state one thing that he/she feels is “going quite well in our congregation right now—accomplishing excellent ministry.” Too often, church-leader meetings concentrate only on “what’s broke” rather than “what’s going right.”

After everyone has spoken, go around the room again. Require every chairperson to identify one matter “to which we probably need to pay close attention—to insure maximum ministry results.”

The pastor asks the chairpersons, “Which of these should we make part of our ‘visioning for the future’ thinking-and-planning agenda?”

Note the important items. Carry the BIG matters forward to the next or subsequent meetings. At that time the pastor may ask questions such as, “How are we doing on this matter? What else should we be considering in (a) the short term of coming weeks and months and (b) the long term of next year or coming years?” This process produces and plants seeds in chairpersons’ subconscious minds and develops a gradual consensus regarding important visions for the future.

In the days and weeks following each of the quarterly strategic planning team meetings, the various chairpersons informally recruit and involve members of the congregation in accomplishing the various ministries and projects.

C. A maximum of seven small committees perform the management function in church life. Four of the seven—the Trustees, the Staff-Parish Relations Committee (called the personnel committee in many denominations), the Nominating Committee, and the Finance Committee are essential and are required committees in some denominations.

Call the remaining three committees the NOW system (Nurture, Outreach, and Worship).

- Example of how to make this shift: The nominating committee nominates six people for each of the seven committees (three people per committee in churches under fifty in average worship attendance), with three-year, rotating terms.
- Then group your presently-existing longer list of committees under those seven headings and convert some of those present committees to “ministry teams” that operate under the auspices of a committee but whose members do not have to attend committee meetings.

Committees meet every three month at 7:30 p.m. (the same evening as the strategic planning team comprised of the committee chairpersons meets for a sandwich supper at 6:00 p.m.).

Rationale: Few churches have effective committee systems unless all the committees meet at stated times during the year. Committees that meet “only when we have something to meet about” ordinarily have most of their decisions made for them by the chairperson, or by the chairperson and one of the staff members. While this may appear to be more efficient, it frequently means that not enough people have input. This produces (1) some bad decisions based on insufficient information, (2) a low energy level among committee members, (3) low creativity in each of the committees, (4) the belief by some church

members that “two or three people make all the decisions in our church,” and (5) an opportunity for the pastor and staff to get most of the blame for anything that goes wrong or does not get done.

This every-three-months system in which all committees meet on the same night has several beneficial results. (1) It reduces the amount of time that the pastor, staff, and members spend in meetings each month, thus increasing their available time for other ministries. (2) It increases the flow of communication between and among committees. (3) It increases the level of responsibility carried by each of the committees. (4) It eliminates the possibility that an individual serves on more than one committee (an unnecessary and counterproductive pattern). (5) It decreases any tendency for an over-controlling pastor or layperson to dominate committee decisions. (6) It provides childcare for all the committees on the same night, thereby allowing both the husband and wife in young families to participate.

Note: The Personal committee and the Nominating Committee are exceptions to this pattern of “all on the same night, every three months”—since several of the members are of necessity also serve on other committees.

D. Four, six, or more “ministry teams” operate under the auspices of and in addition to the seven committees. Each ministry team is comprised of church members and worship attendees who have not yet joined the church. Ministry team leaders recruit their teams in informal ways throughout the year. Most team members begin serving in January. Others are invited to join a ministry team at other times of the year. Ministry teams are in-service learning experiences for congregational newcomers. The nominating committee does not nominate members for the ministry teams.

Ministry teams are not new; only the title is new. Examples of ministry teams that have long played important roles in congregations across the country include the adult choir, the ushers, morning worship greeters, food pantry workers, and used-clothing workers.

Ministry team is *not* a new term for committee, subcommittee, or task force, each of which serves a valid but different kind of function. Ministry teams fit the way incredibly busy young adults are willing to volunteer their limited time. Married couples today work an average of 26 percent longer per week than they did thirty years ago. (*American Demographics*, July 2000) They will give time to (1) meaningful relationships with other people and (2) opportunities to make a difference in the lives of other people. However, only about 15 percent of young adults are willing to give their precious time to (1) positions of status on boards/committees and (2) attending meetings.

Ministry teams create a marvelous mix of task and fellowship. Affinity (a passion or enthusiasm) glues the ministry team together. While the affinity may seem unimportant to other people, members of the ministry team feel it is the best way to use their gifts or skills to make a difference.

Ministry teams are not a rotation of members to accomplish a specific task. That procedure focuses only on a task and produces almost no fellowship while accomplishing each task.

Ministry teams function in accordance with the congregation’s core values, beliefs, vision, and mission. The committees do not assume micro-management control of the ministry teams. Linkage focuses more on empowerment and accountability than on supervision. Church staff and lay leaders who experience the most transition stress when adding ministry teams to their governing board and committee system typically have a high personal need to control or to be controlled.

Each ministry team has authority to take any action it chooses as long as the action (1) is consistent with the congregation’s core values, beliefs, vision, and mission and (2) does not require financial funding that exceeds that ministry team’s line item in the church budget. For example, one congregation says that the formation of a new ministry team is automatically approved if the proposed ministry (1) introduces people to Jesus in positive ways, (2) helps people grow spiritually, or (3) relieves suffering. In another congregation, the formation of a new ministry team is automatically approved if (1) the goal is consistent with the congregation’s values, beliefs, and mission and (2) the person with the ministry team idea can find three other people to help him or her accomplish it. This kind of permission-giving atmosphere increases

the number of enthusiastic, energetic people in a church's ministries.

E. Schedule a leadership seminar for committee chairpersons each January. Review matters such as the annual responsibility list for each committee. The annual January seminar also teaches how to form ministry teams, delegate, develop meeting agendas, conduct effective meetings, communicate with the other committee chairpersons, and provide newsletter information to the church office.

F. The nominations committee attempts to have one-third of each committee consist of people who joined the congregation during the past five years. Research indicates that 34 percent of the typical congregation's members began attending within the last five years. Even in churches with smaller percentages of newcomers, the varied backgrounds and experiences of the newest members ensure a continuous flow of new ideas and a broadening of perspective.

Scrupulously apply three-year term limits to (1) protect people from burnout and (2) avoid the appearance that "a few people make all the decisions around here." Nominate for each committee as many age-twenty-five-to-forty-four people as possible. Limit committee size to six people; three people in extremely small churches.

Scrupulously apply two-year term limits to committee chairpersons. Members of the nominations committee do not nominate themselves as chairpersons.

Do not nominate two members of an immediate family (spouse, parents, and children) to the same committee. As much as possible, avoid such nominations for the governing board.

No one serves on more than one committee (with the exception of the staff-parish relations committee and the nominations committee and a few people who must serve "by virtue of office").

Three tendencies cause many congregations to assign committee roles to a short list of people. (1) We ask people to help us who we know personally. (2) We ask people to help us who have proven their dependability in the past. (3) We ask people to help us who agree with your viewpoints.

This natural "running downhill to a smaller leadership group over a period of years" tends to (1) burn out the church's hardest-working core leadership group and (2) reduce the involvement of, and thereby the commitment of, other church members.

The individuals who burn out (1) begin to feel judgmental toward people who do not work as hard and (2) begin to feel that they *own* their committee rather than *serve* on a committee. Those self-destructive and church-destructive feelings come to virtually everyone who serves too long on one committee, no matter how spiritually committed or idealistic that individual is.

Some congregation find it helpful to test new organizational structures on an experimental basis, by saying, "We will see how this system works and change back to the previous model if this does not work out as well as we expect." That approach often helps a small church to get past "status-quo veto votes."

In many cases in which the pastor wants to shift to the procedures described above, he or she should test the idea out in a conversation with the congregation's matriarch or patriarch before bringing it off the drawing board for discussion at meetings.

Turnaround Strategy #23: Keep facility improvement costs separate from your operating budget.

Contrary to what many people fear, a capital-fund campaign for facilities improvement rarely has a negative impact on regular budget giving. The opposite is more often true. In most cases, the positive experience of giving to an effectively designed and implemented capital campaign significantly increases regular giving to the operating budget during subsequent years.

Generally speaking, mainline congregations should never combine their annual budget campaign with a capital campaign for facilities improvement. Combining the two appeals tempts some members to split their present level of giving between capital and budget, rather than making an over-and-above gift to the facilities improvement project.

Separating the two endeavors creates more effective opportunities for congregational inspiration and education. Scripture provides a basis for that practical advice. In the Bible we see two types of gifts—(1) gifts that build the temple, which come as additional offerings on unique occasions and (2) regular and ongoing gifts that run the temple by supporting the priests, religious celebrations, and benevolences.

Turnaround Strategy #24: Remove ministry inhibiting barriers in your church buildings and property. Church buildings either lift or put lids on the quality of functioning and relationships by pastor leaders, policy leaders, and program leaders.

- A. Study the five most frequently seen ministry-inhibiting lids and some ideas for lifting them:
 - (1) Insufficient or over-sufficient sanctuary seating
 - a. Most people experience a room that is 80-85 percent full on an average Sunday as “uncomfortably full.”
 - b. If the sanctuary feels uncomfortably empty (which usually happens when the pews are less than 50 percent filled), removing a few of the back and/or a few of the front pews and placing them in storage can improve the atmosphere.
 - (2) Insufficient parking
 - a. At least one close-by parking space is needed for each two worshipers.
 - b. Fewer parking spaces than that keep a restraining lid on attendance (a lid that is invisible until the first month after you remove it).
 - c. The long-term solution to insufficient parking is either to buy more adjacent lots or to relocate the church building to a site that has sufficient parking.
 - d. The short-term solution to inadequate parking is to ask a dozen or two of the most active leaders to who are physically able to do so and are willing to make the sacrifice to park at a distance, so that newcomers do not drive away when they see that there is no place to park.
 - (3) Insufficient classroom space
 - a. Build more classrooms.
 - b. Ask one or more adult classes to meet in the living room of a home near the church.
 - (4) Insufficient fellowship hall space
 - a. Build a larger fellowship hall,
 - b. Make arrangements with a nearby high school or other institution to use their facilities for church meal functions involving the entire congregation.
 - (5) Insufficient contemporary decor of the building
 - a. Some architects say, “Most rooms that have not been updated for twenty years feel “old” to most of the people who visit them for the first time.”
 - b. Research indicates that newcomers become so accustomed to the inadequate ambiance of a room or facility after six visits that they no longer see it as drab, outdated, or museum-like. Why? The positive relationships with people in the facility gradually replace negative feelings about room ambiance.
 - c. What if newcomers are so put off by the “old” feeling of the facility that they do not return? The positive ambiance of friendly church members never gets a chance to replace the negative ambiance of the facility.
- B. Small churches in which many leaders have been members for several decades are especially prone to not seeing one or more of the five ministry-inhibiting lids.
- C. The following ideas can help to address facility lids:

☉ The most important places to begin improvements in older buildings are (1) the church nursery, (2) the hallways on the way to the nursery and elementary classrooms; some of these hallways are narrow and dark; with thirty-watt bulbs every thirty feet, they have all the ambiance of the catacombs with none of the spiritual significance, (3) the rest rooms, especially the women's restroom, and (4) the narthex, or main entryway; in some congregations these spaces have all the appeal of a cluttered freight office.

To address the need to improve the narthex, employ an interior decorator for a few hours (she or he must never have been in this building before) and ask for suggestions on how to improve the ambiance. These improvements are usually not expensive but they make a big difference in first impressions among newcomers.

☉ Healthy, effective congregations ask four questions about any facility improvement project they are considering. The order in which leaders ask these questions is crucial. (1) Is this facility improvement something God wants us to do, something that will produce real ministry benefits in the lives of people? (2) Is the timing right; are we ready to do it now? (3) Can we afford this improvement? (4) How would we pay for it? Ineffective church leaders scramble the sequence of those questions, asking the fourth and third questions while disregarding the other two questions. Effective, healthy churches never have enough money, because they use all their money in various ministries. God gives churches the money to do what he calls them to do in ministry.

☉ Appoint a facilities improvement study task force and ask this group to obtain more information about the improvements needed in your present facilities. Over a period of about two months, the facilities improvement study task force should gather ideas from all classes and groups of every age to begin surfacing important issues that your church should discuss concerning facilities. Visit each adult Sunday school class; hold a meeting of all elementary and youth class teachers; talk with each committee in the church; and communicate with all ministry groups that presently use any part of your facilities. Following the completion of those visits, as the next step during the next couple of months, go back to all of these groups and ask individuals to prioritize a list of possibilities.

☉ Congregations always find it easier to raise money for several small projects all at one time than to raise the same amount of money over a period of years in several different efforts. Raising money one project at a time means (1) some people are for it, some against, and (2) it seems like "we talk about money all the time." By contrast, "putting all your begs in one asket" means that everyone sees at least one of their pet projects on the list and therefore has a good reason to give generously.

☉ A "Miracle Sunday" campaign for multiple facility improvements has raised an amount equal to between one-third and three times the size of the church's annual operating budget in countless congregations across the United States (to download a free copy of detailed "how-to-do-it" information on this sixteen-week process, go to www.TheParishPaper.com). The following factors are important for succeeding with a Miracle Sunday: (1) Establish one or more causes or needs that almost everyone will enthusiastically support. (2) A goal that is less than one-third of your annual budget apparently does not stimulate people's imaginations sufficiently to produce a successful effort.

Turnaround Strategy #25: Conduct a "Miracle Sunday" campaign to fund turnaround strategies.

Those needs might include (a) upgrading some parts of your facilities, (b) launching one or two ministries with children from un-churched, young-adult families, and (c) increasing your community visibility through newspaper ads and direct mail during the Easter and Christmas seasons. Use the sixteen-week, step-by-step instructions to conduct a Miracle Sunday campaign (go to www.TheParishPaper.com for a free copy of the how-to-do-it instructions).

Which of these twenty-five turnaround ideas might your church want to use in a turnaround strategy? The best way to predict the future is to invent it. These ideas, systematically implemented across three years by your congregation's Parish Enrichment Planning Team, can reinvent a congregational future consistent with Jesus's instructions to his first disciples: (a) Help people grow spiritually in their relationship with God. (b) Love our neighbors in church, community, and world. (c) Offer Christ to people outside our walls (Luke 10:25-37, Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 2:41-42).

X: The Bottom Line. An elderly subscriber stormed up to the desk of a cub reporter in the local newspaper's offices. With fuming anger the man waved a copy of the newspaper. "Look at this!" he shouted. "You listed me in the obituary column last week!"

Not quite sure how to respond, the reporter handled the situation boldly. "It is not our newspaper's policy to publish retractions," he explained, "but I'll tell you what we can do. In next week's edition we can include you in the new-births column."

Small churches cannot erase the negative elements of their past. However, observations across the United States indicate that their leaders can place small churches in the new-births column. That happens when leaders (a) recognize that God can do this, (b) decide to let it happen, and (c) make plans to help it happen.

What do you think? Should we list our church in the new-births column?

Why not?