

# **Dying to Live**

A Presentation on Church Restart

# Part 1

The Church in the U.S. Context

# Why this Project?

- Led a church restart at Northwest Community Church
- Completion of Doctor of Ministry at Wesley Theological Seminary
- We are losing ground in North America
- A seismic shift is happening in the migration to cities.
- In times when so many churches are declining, the hope of renewal needs to be shared.
- Intimate access to 3 restarted congregations

# What is a Church Restart?

- It is a radical break with a church's past history.
- A strategic death of a congregation so that a new congregation can take its place.
- An attempt to bring about monumental change to churches that would not be able to sustain the pain of the transformation were they still living.

# Losing Ground in the U.S.

- Between 1990-2006, we had a net gain of 52 million people in the U.S.
- However, the number of people attending church stayed the same!
- The percent who attend church has dropped from 20.4% to 17.5% in 2005
- The Northeast is the hardest hit with a 21% decline in attendance.

*The American Church in Crisis* by David T. Olson

# Urban Church Attendance

- Overall, attendance is higher than the U.S. average in Baltimore and DC at 28.% and 25.7% respectively.
- In the Baltimore – DC region, we experienced 35% growth in population from 1990 – 2010 with only a 16% growth in church attendance.
- Urban renewal is happening but established urban churches are more likely than average to be in decline.

# The Church Landscape

- New churches average 4-12% growth in their early years.
- Typically after their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary they begin a long, sustained period of decline.
- 80% of churches are believed to be either stagnant or in decline.
- Mainline churches are suffering the most.
- The rate of decline of older evangelical churches (pre-1965) has been increasing since the 1990s.

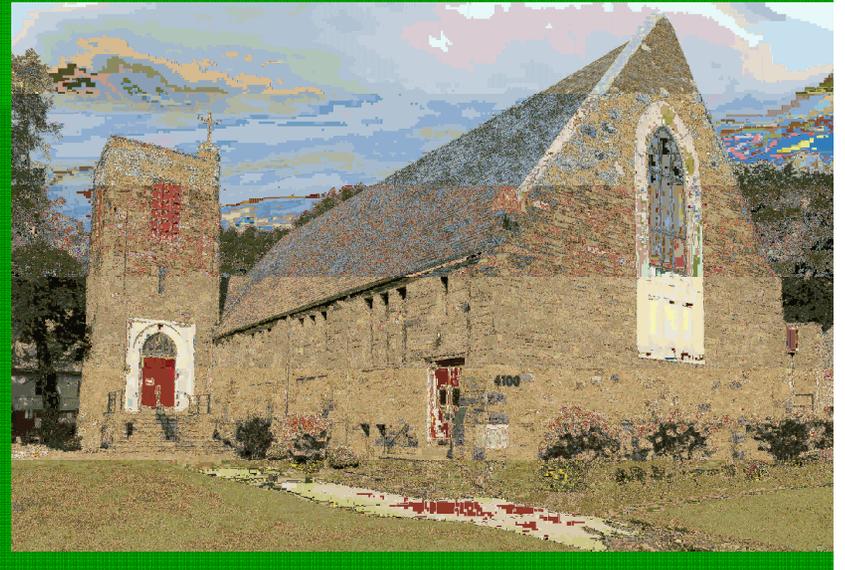
# First Church of God, Baltimore

- Founded in 1901
- Peaked in 1970s at 350-400
- 45 in attendance (2011) between 53-70 yr. old
- No reported yearly baptisms
- 3 Ministries
- Traditional Music
- Vision – “To stay alive”
- \$90,000 budget
- Near Death



# National Memorial Church of God

- Founded in 1941
- Peak attendance in 1942 with 240
- 32 in attendance in 2005 (53-70 yr old)
- 0-1 baptisms/yr.
- 2 ministries
- Traditional Music
- Vision: Survive & Represent the CHOG
- Budget of \$95,000
- Near Death



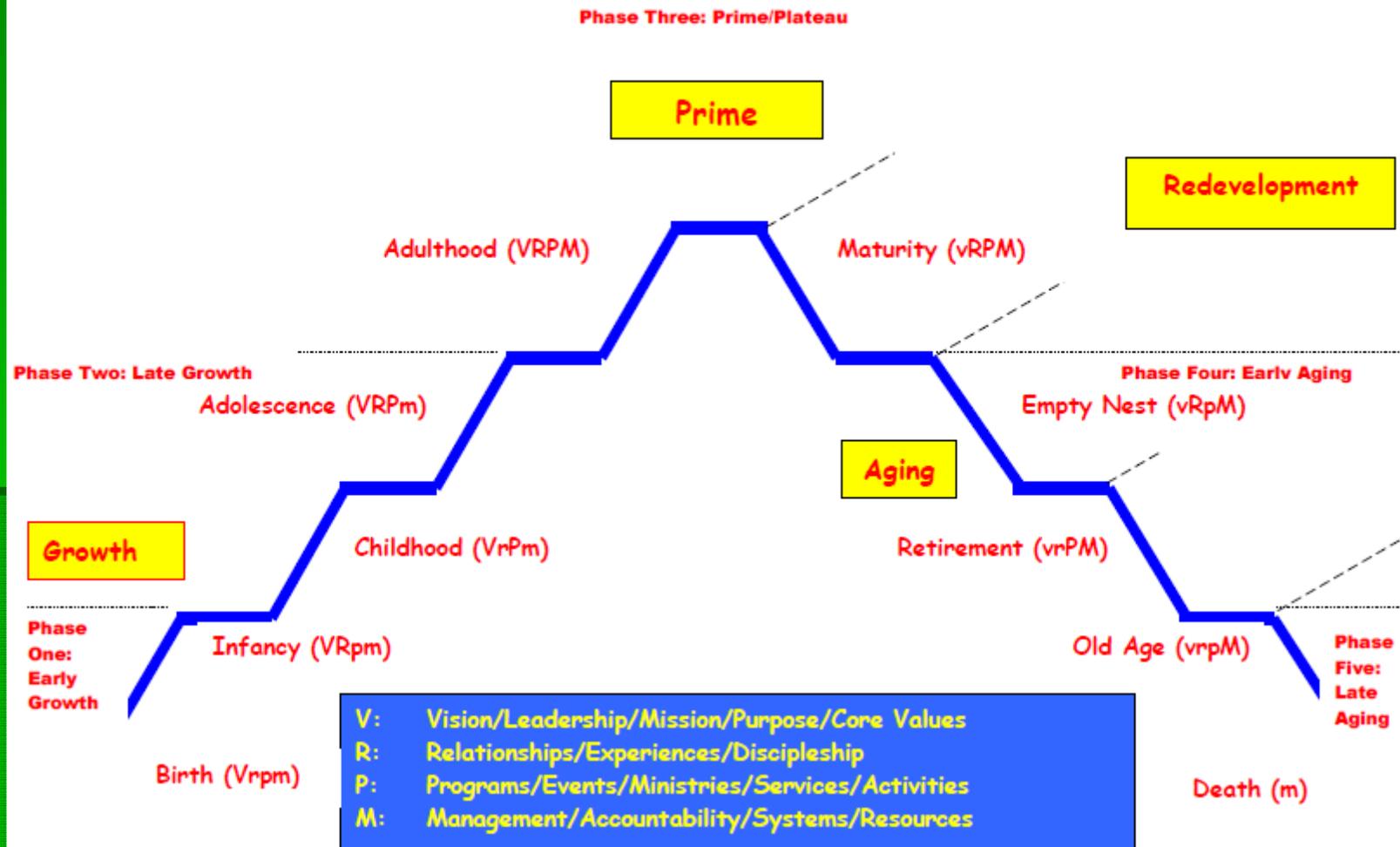
# National Church of the Nazarene

- Founded in early 1900s
- Peak attendance in 1980s at 350
- 25 in attendance in 2006 (53-70 yr old)
- 0 Baptisms/yr
- 1 Ministry
- Traditional Music
- Vision: Survive & Get Young People
- Budget of \$200,000
- Near Death



# Church Life Cycle

## The Life Cycle and Stages of Congregational Development



# Final Stages of Life

- Gathers weekly out of habit and is mainly a preaching station or chaplaincy ministry.
- The congregation is afraid to do anything for fear that it could end in its final death.
- The congregation has little to no ministries, lots of funerals and the pastor is likely to seek meaningful activity outside of the church through the community or the larger denomination.
- The congregation is frustrated and gives up hope in their efforts to find renewal, so it finally comes to place of rest.
- Members are not being added. The baptismal sits unused.
- All that is left is management, and often congregations in this stage are way over-managed.

# Part 2

A Closer Look at the Restart  
Process

# The Restart Process

- De-structure
- Authorize
- Revise
- Innovate
- Assimilate.

# De-structure

- Reduce the number of layers in the organizational chart
- Reduce the number of people who hold offices
- Reduce the number of committees and meetings and refashion policies and procedures to enable quicker, easier, more decisive decision-making.
- Dissolve the church board and suspend the by-laws, creating the opportunity for a completely new approach to decision-making
- Often a gestation period of 4-6 months (“going dark”)
- Often members are released

# Authorize

- New leaders to be placed in control of the congregation that are visionaries.
  - May be a completely outside group
- Clearly delineate the available assets and resources and who is in control of them
- All church programs and ministries are evaluated by judicatory leaders
- Judicatory leaders determine which programs continue to function and which ones cease

# Revise

- Vision
- Target group
- Outreach strategy
- Discipleship strategy
- Culture and Philosophy
- Evaluate facilities and what needs to be updated. Relocation a possibility

# Innovate

- New strategies
- Church name
- Add staff
- Change children's program
- Change worship style
- Change approach to outreach/evangelism
- Change approach to newcomer assimilation
- Change or add a marketing strategy with website

# Assimilate

- Acclimate remnant group to new culture
  - Do they match the new mission field?
  - Do they have chemistry with the new pastor?
  - Do they have baggage?
  - Do they have leadership potential?
  - Do they have control and authority issues?

# Part 3

A Theological Framework for the  
Restart Process

# The Church of Jesus Christ

- Jesus is the founder & essence of the Church
- The history of God's people has always included death, a remnant and a rebirth
- Body of Christ is bigger than one local expression
  - Church can grow even as a local expression dies.
  - Kingdom perspective vs. local church perspective
- Church is meant to be filled with Christ's Spirit to be on mission to the lost

# Essential Functions of the Church

- We are called to be a people who routinely come together (Hebrews 10:25)
- To ascribe glory to the God of creation (Psalm 29:1-2).
- We are also called to disciple and encourage each other within the body of believers (Ephesians 4:11-13).
- We are called to be a church on mission (Matthew 28:19-20).

# A word on insularism

- An insular church is one of the marks of a "false church."
- Insularism is "the desire to enjoy the benefits the church confers without reaching out in sacrificial love to a world groping in darkness."
- "Insularism often takes the form of exclusivism, in which the grace of God is confined to the rites and pronouncements of the church, and the message of God is limited to those who share common values and social allegiances."

Donald Bloesch, *The Church: Sacraments, Worship, Ministry, Mission*

# The Church & the City

- God chose a city as his dwelling place
- Jesus' ministry points toward and climaxes in Jerusalem
- The early church spreads by focusing on cities
- God loves the city and has worked within cities to further the expansion of His kingdom

# Mark 8:31-33

- Jesus is setting up the idea of death not as a tragic fate but as something that is freely accepted and purposeful. V31-33

# Mark 8:34-35

- He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. (NRSV)
- Can we take this corporately?

# Denial

- Denial is "to act in a selfless way and to give up one's place at the center of things." - John Donahue
- "The saying is a call to give up the connection with the past and with the intended future by which one's own identity has been established. At the same time, the context confers a new or larger identity." – William Beardslee

# Lose Life to Find it

- Directly tied to the mission
  - “...for the sake of the gospel”
- A church that dies to itself is allowing itself to be placed in a pregnant tomb.
- The passage is an invitation for a church to sacrifice its own personal preferences and desire for security and sameness for the sake of the gospel.

# Part 4

Study Process

# Study Process

- Interview with Lead Pastors
  - Leadership
  - Nature of the Decline
  - Steps taken in Restart
  - Effectiveness of Restart
  - Lessons learned
- Collection of Descriptive Data
- Member Interviews
  - Remnant Members
  - New Members since restart

# Remnant Interviews

- 3 from each church
- How they experienced the transition
- What caused them to stay
- How they perceive the new church
- How happy they are with the new church

# New Member Interviews

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- 3 from each church
- What do they know about the old church?
- What attracted them to the church
- Would they have come to the old church
- How satisfied are they with the church

# Part 5

## Leadership Findings

# Describing the Restart Leader

- A ReStart Pastor is a kind of 'schizophrenic' undertaking.
- Items in Tension
  - Future – Past
  - New Ministry – Care for Broken Congregation
  - Leading on Front Lines – Caring for Wounded in Camp
  - New Target Group – Established Congregation
- A “Church Planter Plus” – Ken Priddy
- A “Super Reorganizer” – Gary McIntosh
  - Only 2% of church leaders

# The Pastors

- Dan Turner
- Rob Kazeo
- Dave Biggers

# Leadership Findings

- Ability to Adapt Leadership Style
- High sense of calling
- Reliance on a Mentor or Coach
- Blend of a leader and caregiver
- Stubborn and Resilient

# Part 6

Restart Process Findings

# Destructure

- Northwest Community
  - Released members
  - Board released control and disbanded
  - Gestation Period
- Mosaic
  - Board size reduced
  - Pastor receives support to lead plan
  - Worship moved to dining area
- Transforming Life
  - Agreement made with HGC/CDP
  - Move to governance model structure
  - HGC recommends next pastor
  - Commitment to outward focused strategy

# Authorize

- Northwest Community
  - Outside Leadership Team made all decisions
  - Congregation did not have a vote for 2 yrs.
- Mosaic
  - Pastor's 18 month restart plan became guiding focus
  - Most board members allowed to continue
- Transforming Life
  - Congregation agreed to a covenant
  - Consequences if they didn't keep it
  - Board members continued but started new structure

# Revise

- Northwest Community
  - New name selected
  - Target 25-40 yr old multi-ethnic
  - Different worship style, focus on singles and young families, intentional diversity
- Mosaic
  - New vision of community centered on table
  - Focus on diversity (new name)
  - Community focus
- Transforming Life
  - Shift towards an Afro-centric congregation
  - Strong outward focus

# Innovate

- Northwest Community
  - Community partnerships & outreach
  - Facility renovations
  - Drastic change in worship style
  - Marketing strategy and website
- Mosaic
  - Incorporated table fellowship into service
  - Facility & Signage updates
  - Marketing and outreach
  - Ancient-future approach to worship
- Transforming Life
  - Change in worship and preaching style
  - Focus on reaching neighborhood
  - Working to add value community through training

# Assimilate

- Northwest Community
  - Maintained 65% of previous members
  - Younger members were hungry for change
  - Senior adults continued to give
- Mosaic
  - Maintained 80% of previous members
  - Disconnect between remnant and new target group
  - Remnant felt connected to Pastor Kazeem
- Transforming Life
  - Maintained 80% of previous members (so far)
  - Ready for change but mourning the loss of friends (Anglos)

# Assimilate (cont'd)

- Remnant group was positive about their new church
  - More effective, healthier, better at reaching lost, pride in inviting
- Why did they stay?
  - Sense of commitment
  - “I wanted to see what would happen”

# Assimilate (con'td)

- "Don't be rigid...be open to suggestions of change...stick with it for a little while and see what happens...stay focused on the church's ultimate mission...Welcome change. Change is inevitable...Don't be easily turned away if things aren't how you like them." - *advice from remnant members surveyed*

# Part 7

After the Restart

# Average Results (3 churches)

- 2.6 more people in attendance
  - 25 to 65; 32 to 86; 45 to 110
- Budgets are 53% higher
- 6.4 times more ministries
- Moved from “decline and near death” to a “slow sustained growth”
- Dramatic increase in baptisms
- Average age has dropped from senior adults to Gen Xers (35 year olds)
- New members outnumber remnant by more than 2 to 1.
- New vision and mission

# New Member Survey

- Overall “very satisfied” with their church
- None said they would have come to the old church
- They see their church as healthy and are willing to invite others
- They knew very little about previous congregation or its culture

# Conclusions

## Radical Denial

- Denied comforts and certainty of a congregation that had served their needs and the needs of their family and friends for decades.
- Denied comfort of a familiar worship service and traded it for a risky and unfamiliar style of worship.
- Denied the security of a large savings account and in all three cases risked it all to make a fresh start.
- Denied joy of worshipping with members they had known for years for the risk of welcoming people they had never met.
- Denied familiar path of church programs and internal ministries for the risk of engaging their communities in new ways.

# Conclusions for Churches

- There was a hope in death
- From severe disconnection to their community to a reengagement
  - Renewed vision for their city
- They are beating the odds
- Each restart looked different
  - But involved a radical break from past

# Conclusions for Leaders

- More leaders are capable of doing a restart than realize it.
- Restart can also revitalize a leader's passion and calling
- The ideal restart pastor is...
  - Adaptable
  - Shown history of leadership and shepherding

# Conclusions for Judicatories

- They should actively be involved in identifying and aiding churches in the late stages of decline
- They can serve as temporary leaders as a church restarts
- They can take some of the pressure off of the restart pastor to do it all

# Final Thought

- Death had to happen before the resurrection became possible.

# Part 8

Recommended Resources

# Resources

- Larry McKain, *Falling in Love with the Church* (Kansas City, MO: NCS Publishing, 2004).
- Gary L. McIntosh, *Taking Your Church to the Next level: What Got You Here Won't Get you There* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009).
- Armstrong, Bill. "ReStart Ramp Up" (training presented at the Church Planter's Bootcamp, Anderson, IN, June 23, 2006.)
- Bloesch, Donald. *The Church: Sacraments, Worship, Ministry, Mission*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002.

# Resources (cont'd)

- Bullard Jr., George. *Radical Congregational Transformation*. Atlanta, GA: TCP Leadership Series, 2012. Kindle e-book.
- Bullard, George Jr.. "A Congregational Resource Guide Learning Pathway - Spiritual Strategic Journey: Tutorial for Congregational Redevelopment," The Alban Institute. [www.congregationalresources.org/Bullard.asp](http://www.congregationalresources.org/Bullard.asp) (accessed 2006).

## Resources (cont'd)

- Keller, Timothy J.. *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012.
- Olson, David T.. *The American Church in Crisis: Groundbreaking Research Based on a National Database of over 200,000 Churches*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009. Kindle e-book.