

CHURCH REVITALIZATION: FROM CRISIS TO HOPE

Instructor: Adm. Asst. J. Elwood Gatlin, Sr.

*Pastor of Pentecostal Temple @ COGIC Square
Florence SC - cogicsquare.org*



Opening Activity

Write down any current issues that you would like to discuss concerning your ministry.

VISION

Definition: A clear, inspiring, and practical picture of the future you desire.

"An undisclosed expectation is pre-meditation for resentment."

Opening Session: Vision and Purpose

"Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." (Psalm 127:1)

Over the last twenty years of my ministry at two different churches in two different states a picture of the late Bishop Joseph Howard Sherman, Sr. has hung over my shoulder but the promises of God to the ministry has been hanging over my life.

1: Honoring the Legacy Without Creating Monuments

Museums are for artifacts; a church is a living organism.

- A. Recognize and honor the contributions of the "saints before us" without turning their work into monuments.
- B. Acknowledge past leaders while moving forward with a fresh, living vision.
- C. Encourage the church to embrace a movement of God rather than clinging to relics of the past.
- D. Set the stage for restoring relevance in the church by blending respect for the past with a forward-looking Kingdom vision.
- E. Extinguishing the light of the founders will not make your light shine any brighter.

2: Moving from Crisis to Stability

Case Study: Upon my arrival I was presented a church that only had 11 faithful senior members. The building had no phone, no central air/heat, a 34-year-old dilapidated roof, an inoperable organ that had not been played in over 15 years and no insurance.

How do we address urgent physical needs of the church alongside spiritual renewal.

- A. Create practical steps for prioritizing needs and involving the congregation in repairs and renovations.
- B. Identify immediate needs vs. long-term goals for congregational renewal.

3: Understanding Your Inherited Congregation

- A. Three Types of Church Members:
 1. Stepchildren: Those who were present when you arrived.
 2. Adopted Children: Members from other congregations who join later.
 3. Your Children: New believers who meet Christ under your leadership.
- B. Balancing Ministry to All:
 1. Address the needs of each group with love, wisdom, and balance.
 2. Pray for a strategy to build trust with long-standing members while welcoming newcomers.
 3. Develop a plan to engage each type of member in church activities and leadership.

4: Embracing Kingdom Mindset Over Denominational Labels

"I'm not preaching COGIC; I'm preaching Kingdom."

- A. Focus on the presence of God ("signs on the inside") over denominational identity ("signs on the outside").
- B. Shift the focus from tradition to Kingdom values that foster unity and spiritual growth.
- C. Cultivate an atmosphere of transformation that prioritizes Kingdom culture over church politics.

5: Bridging Generations and Styles

- A. Integrate the new, younger members with the traditional senior members.
 1. Unity in diversity—celebrate different backgrounds, ages, and worship styles.
- B. Practical Strategies:
 1. Create intergenerational worship and service opportunities.
 2. Use language and themes that resonate with both new and seasoned members.
 3. Develop strategies for including all voices in the church vision.

6: Releasing Traditions That Hinder Growth

- A. How do we address urgent physical needs of the church in concert with addressing spiritual renewal?
- B. Recognize that growth sometimes means letting go of practices or traditions that no longer serve the church's mission.
 - 1. Examine traditions vs. values: Differentiate between cultural habits and Kingdom principles.
 - 2. Understand that the people God brings may not "look like us"- whether it be in appearance, background or style- but that the church be a welcoming place for ALL.
 - 3. Assess how long-standing customs may unintentionally exclude or alienate newcomers.
- C. Identify specific traditions within the church that may need to be adapted or released to foster a welcoming and diverse congregation.

7: Welcoming a Generation Without a Church Reference Point

Recognize that many who come in today may not have a traditional church background or a reference point for church culture.

- A. Shift your focus from maintaining church "culture" to creating a Kingdom-centered environment that meets people where they are.
- B. Reach those who are unchurched or unfamiliar with Christian customs, terminology, or traditions which is key to developing a church that understands your vision.
- C. Avoid "insider language" or customs that may feel foreign or intimidating to newcomers.
- D. Emphasize messages, music, and practices that connect with universal needs and offer a clear understanding of the gospel.
- E. Focus on the essentials of faith that everyone can understand: love, community, support, and transformation.
- F. Train greeters, leaders, and members to warmly welcome those who may feel out of place and create a space for questions and learning.
- G. Incorporate visual aids, stories, and language that relate the gospel to their lives without assuming prior biblical knowledge.
- H. Host "Welcome" or "Introduction to Faith" sessions that explain the basics of Christianity, worship practices, and the church's mission.
- I. Create small groups or mentoring relationships where experienced members guide newcomers in understanding faith and the church community.
- J. Offer ways for them to get involved, learn and grow that ensure that they feel a sense of belonging and that they have a place in the church family.

7 Things You Should Know as a New Pastor In An Existing Church

1. Honor the Past

Acknowledge the church's legacy and the contributions of former leaders. Recognize the history, achievements, and traditions which shows respect and fosters trust. This can include celebrating past milestones, incorporating historical elements into worship, and finding ways to honor the previous pastor's influence.

2. Listen and Observe

Take time to listen to the stories, concerns, and values of congregants. Observe the dynamics within different groups and leadership teams. This listening phase not only builds rapport but also reveals the strengths, unspoken expectations, and potential challenges within the church.

3. Embrace Key Stakeholders

Identify members who hold influence, whether through formal roles (e.g., board members) or relational connections. Engage them in conversations about the church's vision and listen to their insight. These stakeholders can be valuable allies in helping to bridge the gap between the old and new vision for the church.

4. Understand Established Traditions and Values

Every church has rhythms, rituals, and values that form its identity. Recognize which traditions are held dear and determine which may need reimagining. A thoughtful approach will help maintain a sense of continuity while allowing for growth.

5. Build Trust Through Consistency

In an inherited congregation, trust is earned over time. Consistency in actions, communication, and commitment is key to building credibility. Being dependable and transparent in decision-making goes a long way in gaining the congregation's confidence.

6. Communicate Change Thoughtfully

When new changes or ideas are introduced, take time to explain the "why" behind each change, connecting it to the church's mission and values. Highlight how these changes will help the church grow, remain relevant, and honor its spiritual roots.

7. Be Patient and Persevere

Inheriting a congregation requires patience. Transitioning, introducing change, and building relationships may take longer than anticipated. Show steadfastness and adaptability, trusting that your dedication will foster unity and forward movement in time.

Understanding your inherited congregation is ultimately about fostering a sense of mutual respect, unity, and shared vision that honors both the church's heritage and its future.

Exit Strategy

Write down three actionable steps that you can implement in your congregation upon returning.