


SMALL CHURCH
REVITALIZATION
GUIDE



Stories, exercises and more to help small churches grow, serve their communities well and revitalize their ministry.

*A fresh look at
revitalization for
your church*





Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18



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WELCOME TO THE SMALL CHURCH REVITALIZATION GUIDE

This resource was developed out of the experiences CBOQ staff have had interacting with and serving small churches like yours. In 2018 the content of the guide was shared at three Small Church Envisioning days and then refined into this resource booklet.

How to use this resource

The Small Church Revitalization Guide contains thought-provoking material for the whole church to use, either individually or in groups. Different aspects of the guide will help leaders and other teams in your church to evaluate where you need encouragement and to spark discussion on how to move forward as a church.

FOR PASTORS

You might compare the challenges you face with similar ones in chapter 3. How might you turn your particular challenge into an opportunity to learn new skills? Consider the navigation points in chapter 3, then reflect on the stories in chapter 6 and consider a new missional idea from chapter 7. This will help you focus the energy of your church to your community.

FOR SEARCH TEAMS

Each church needs a balance of activities to be healthy. Once you have read the booklet, use the diagram on page 23 to plot out the activities in your church. Where do most of the activities in your church fall? When you have laid out all your activities, look for any gaps and then ask yourselves what kind of pastor you will need to help you develop in those areas.

FOR CHURCH BOARDS

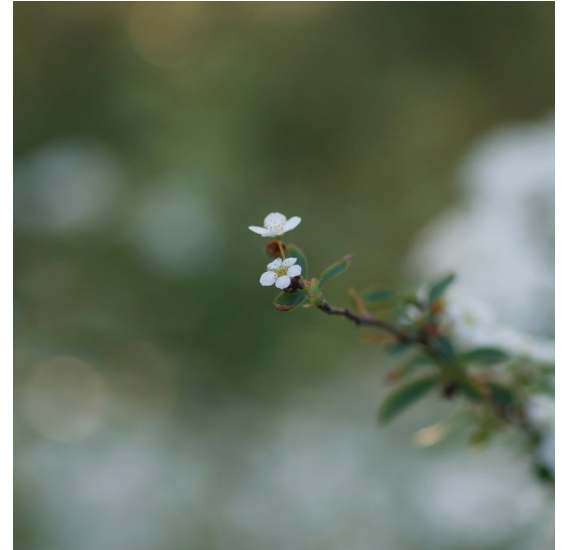
In particular, pay attention to how you can encourage people to volunteer in various roles in your church. Complete the diagram on page 23. Do you have activities that develop people from 'believing in Christ' to 'growing in Christ' to being 'close to Christ' and then being 'Christ-centered'? Are there opportunities to be involved in missional activities that will keep the people who are 'close to Christ' and 'Christ-centered' engaged in your church?

FOR SMALL GROUPS

You may like to use this guide in your prayer or Bible study activities. In the first chapter you will find an exercise that you can do together to help you consider what the Bible says about being small. Then, as you read the resource together, use the 'time to reflect' and 'time to pray' sections as moments to pause and listen to what God is saying to you. At the end of each time you gather together to work through this guide, remember to ask these two key questions: 'what can I do now?' and 'what can we do now?'

SMALL BUT BEAUTIFUL

At a time when being small is often considered as being insignificant we want to give attention to what it means to be small. In the kingdom of God, many principles are reversed; the first is last and the last is first; the greatest takes the humblest seat and the smallest becomes great. In this resource we want to move towards embracing a renewed view of what it means to be small in God's Kingdom.



FINDING YOUR VISION

Small churches often remain small because they have lost sight of what the Church is called to do and to be. This is usually expressed through a nostalgic and self-satisfied way of thinking in the church. When this happens, the result is an inward focus. The church's main priority becomes ministry for its members. Under these circumstances, maintaining momentum will never be easy.

DREAMING BIG

It is essential to re-envision small churches before it is too late. This may not always be an easy journey, but for the sake of communities that need a representation of the Gospel, it is worth the investment. Small churches can make a big impact. This resource is designed to provide ideas and values that will encourage us to hope, dream and plan as we take next steps with God. As we do, surely the best is yet to come.

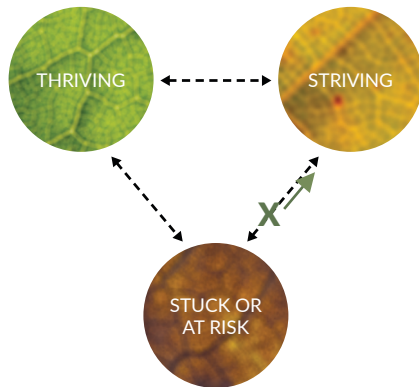


PATHWAY TO THRIVE

THRIVING, STRIVING, STUCK OR AT RISK

This is a simple reflective exercise. Take a minute to prayerfully consider where your congregation is at currently. Which of these words would you use to describe your congregation: thriving, striving, stuck or at risk? No congregation is perfectly thriving and no congregation is completely stuck. If you consider there being a spectrum between each of these words, where do you think your congregation might fit? This exercise can be a good discussion tool for a congregation.

Example



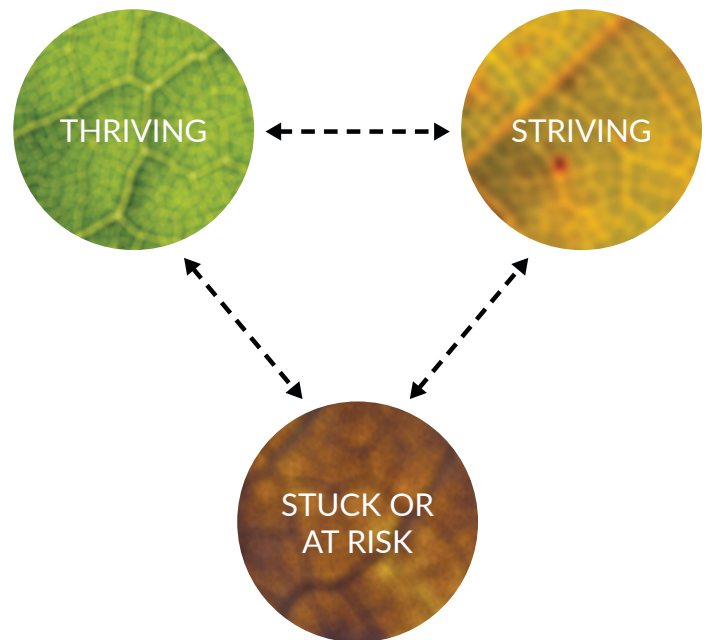
For more ways to help your church thrive, or to request CBOQ's *Thrive* resource, go to baptist.ca/thrive.

Step 1:

Mark an X on the spot you think your congregation is at.

Step 2:

Mark an arrow in the direction that you think your congregation is headed towards.



TIME TO REFLECT

Where would you consider your church to be on this road map? Are you thriving, striving, stuck or at risk? This is a moment to listen to each other and give time to honesty. This might raise difficult questions and issues. Try and share together with an attitude of grace.

TIME TO PRAY

Dear Lord, our church needs your grace so that we may rise above difficulties and disappointments to once again be filled with hope. As we offer ourselves to you today help us to lay down our own way and follow you so that we may be healthy in your sight. Lead us now as we repent where we have wandered from your path so that we may see the fruit of our re-commitment to God. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES FOR SMALLER CONGREGATIONS

1. DECISION FATIGUE

One of the common realities for many smaller congregations is that leaders have cycled through leadership for years or even decades. Leadership is tiring. Many leaders become burdened by decision fatigue.

So what can we do? We have two suggestions.

1. **Learn to get very clear on the question your leadership team is asking.** Discern one question at a time. Other questions or issues that come up might be important. Track those and return to them at a later time. Try not to conflate too many issues together.
2. **Return to previous decisions as a guide.** No two decisions are the same because no two situations are the same. In a smaller congregation, most people know most people. Board discussions often revert to discussions about people and not the core issues. What decisions has the board previously made? Revisit those decisions. Utilize the governing documents and policies you have produced since they too were created by wise, godly people. Every decision does not need to be re-discerned if you already have precedence. Some leadership teams seem to build policy on the fly. Process and policy can be a gift.

2. UNNAMED ASSUMPTIONS

A key challenge for leadership teams of smaller congregations are unnamed assumptions. If members of a leadership cannot clearly describe their personal biases and assumptions how can they provide guidance and direction to the church? We all have opinions, biases and assumptions. The difference between healthy and unhealthy board members and leaders is whether or not

the biases and assumptions are clearly articulated. For example, a board member might state that going into debt as a congregation doesn't honor what the Bible says about stewardship. Others may state that they are investing in the Kingdom. Regardless of whether that is correct or not correct, if the board member can't articulate their belief on this matter, the congregation may not be able to move forward. People may feel like they are sinning against God. Other examples might include board members unnamed assumptions about the role of women in pastoral ministry or the role of local missions in a congregation.

Because unnamed assumptions can be difficult to discern, here are three suggestions to help you.

1. Prayerful Reflection

For important conversations, before getting into the conversation invite people to take a moment of silence to prayerfully ask the Holy Spirit to help them name their assumptions going into the conversation.

2. Ask the Question

Then ask board members to briefly acknowledge any biases or assumptions they have before the conversation begins.

3. Do not Punish for Sharing

Create an environment where board members are not punished, shunned or looked down upon if they share their biases, assumptions or dissent.

3. CLARITY, PARTIAL CLARITY & COMPETING PRIORITIES

One of the differences between a healthy leadership team and an unhealthy leadership team is the ability to distinguish between issues that need clarity, partial clarity or can have competing priorities. For instance, there needs to be complete clarity on some essential aspects of what the church is called to do. Some churches have statements of faith others have covenants. There should be complete clarity on what the board stands for and what the board doesn't stand for. Gossip, backbiting and jealousy have no place in the Church (1 Cor. 3). There should be complete clarity on many issues.

However, the board may only get partial clarity on a number of issues. For instance, how they should go about responding to a person in the congregation that is gossiping. A board might struggle with this issues and choose to agree to stay in a position of partial clarity on how to respond. By contrast, some issues are always going to highlight competing priorities. Examples might be... we have an extra \$10,000 for the next year. Should it go towards building upkeep or starting a new ministry or hiring for a part-time role? A question like whether a church should spend more resources on discipleship or on evangelism might be an ongoing competing priority because both are essential to both the gospel and the life of a congregation. There will likely be competing priorities for a while but eventually decision needs to be made.

Three ways to help navigate clarity, partial clarity and competing priorities:

1. Before starting a discussion, discern how the discussion needs to end with clarity, partial clarity or if its okay for the board to sit with competing priorities.
2. Decide if and how you can move forward on an issue with only partial clarity or even competing priorities.
3. Help board members distinguish that some issues will require them to have complete confidence in the clarity of the decision and action moving forward. Other issues are okay left unresolved.

4. CONFUSING CRITICAL, URGENT & IMPORTANT

Too many leadership teams confuse critical, urgent and important issues. If all of your board meetings are urgent matters that aren't really important than you will never be able to provide the long-term direction needed to help a congregation function well. Too often in smaller congregations the urgent issues take priority. For help on this topic, go to baptist.ca/church-development.

5. MULTIPLE HATS

Members of a small congregation leader team are always wearing multiple hats when they are with the board. Help board members distinguish and acknowledge what hat they are wearing when they voice a concern or take a side on a situation.

What hat
are you
wearing?



implementor



family member



volunteer



congregant



governance



ministry

TIME TO REFLECT

What are the action steps you can take next?
What would you find more helpful in working through these challenges?

TIME TO PRAY

Take a moment now to pause and in silent prayer ask God to speak to you. Share together what you hear.

EIGHT CHALLENGES TO REVITALIZATION

When you serve in a small church, you may begin to think that your particular church is experiencing unique struggles. In fact there are a number of challenges that are common to small churches generally, so let's review these now.

1. The issue of numbers

There comes a point at which it is difficult to run a project or program because there is a lack of people to organize and take responsibility. In this situation, the pastor, or a few people often end up doing most of the work.

2. Comparison

You've heard it said: "The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence." The same is true of churches. Perhaps you attended a church down the street or while you were away somewhere and the grass just seemed so much greener. Some people might be tempted to feel discontentment with their own church, or attempt to apply another churches' apparent "success" models in their own context. The challenge of comparison is always a danger when considering revitalization.

3. Fear of failure

If we have been disappointed in the past, particularly when attempting something new, this may keep us from venturing into anything that requires change in the future. We don't take risks because we fear that we might be disappointed again.

4. Lack of energy

When a congregation has a majority of older people and few younger families, having enough people with the energy to run church events and be consistent in them might be a challenge to revitalization.

5. Survival mentality

A decline in a congregation's numbers, for whatever reason, and demographic changes in the community can lead to an unsettled feeling in a small church which, in turn, can lead to a survival mentality. As the church questions why numbers are going down and is uncertain how to relate to its changing community, it can become inward focused and start to cater to the preferences of the people that are there. It is then very hard for the church to recognize and prioritize the needs of the people around them.

6. Loss of confidence

A small congregation that has been disappointed by the outcome of things they have already tried may not be confident enough to try the same things again or try new things. For example, if a church has tried an outreach event and few people attended it may begin to doubt that it can have a spiritual impact on the lives of people in the community and may struggle to represent God in meaningful and tangible ways. The healthy spirituality of the congregation might be replaced by a desire to make sure that everyone gets along with each other, in order to sustain the church. This can reduce the church to a social club.

7. Disobedience

In the game of basketball, when a foul is committed the referee will blow the whistle and the game has to stop and resume from the point at which the foul occurred. The team that fouled could continue to play after the whistle has been blown and even score a basket, but it would not count because of the rules. It is very much like this with a disobedient church. God will give a church a vision and a mandate of what it is meant to do and if the church does not do it, it is as if God blows the whistle on the church. The church itself can maintain its existence

for years, without doing what God has asked them to do. The whistle has been blown, however, and a hurdle to revitalization is failure to return to the point of disobedience and, through repentance, do what God has said.

8. Failure to connect with the community

What every declining church has in common is a failure to connect in some way with the community around it.

KEY POINTS TO HELP LEADERS NAVIGATE THESE ISSUES

1. It is important to note that resistance to change is part of the revitalization process. Have you ever been to a church where people say ‘we all get along very well and never argue about anything?’ Their statement is true simply because the church is not doing anything. Grappling with real issues, dilemmas and challenges are all part of the revitalization process.
2. It is also part of the process to recognise that we learn from failure. So, attempting new things and adjusting things as we progress is a valuable part of the journey.
3. Recognise that we have personal limitations. God calls us to be part of small churches to not only share our gifts, skills and talents in that context but also for our own personal sanctification. Recovering the spiritual disciplines, therefore, will be of benefit for you and the church.

Revitalization happens as real people and churches take steps to grow and learn together. The stories in Chapter 6 give us hope that what another church has done is possible for us too.

TIME TO PRAY

What key things will you commit to work on individually and as a church? Pray with that in mind.

“Dear Lord Jesus, you are more interested in what we become than what we do. Lead us now as we commit ourselves to growing in our discipleship. We at times feel tired or unsure as we seek to move beyond our comfort zones. Help us to encourage each other as we walk with you together. Amen.”



SUSTAINABLE SPIRITUALITY IN THE LEADING OF A SMALL CHURCH

The dictionary definition of the word “relentless” means to be consistent and incessant. For us to discover our Kingdom potential in leading small churches we need to be relentless in our leadership. Here are a few pointers to help us focus our energies wisely.

RELENTLESS PURSUIT

We need to build a spiritual foundation of trust in Jesus we serve his church and he is faithful to his people. This will mean that we are relentless in our pursuit of Jesus:

- Refocusing on the person of Jesus so that you can return to your first love. In Revelation 2:4, this is what the church was invited to do so that it could be revitalized.
- Your small congregation can allow for greater flexibility through discussion based sermons, drama or greater participatory opportunities.
- When reading the Scriptures ask the Holy Spirit to give you fresh eyes to see the stories of Jesus. Ask that He reveal areas in your lives where you need to live afresh, as if Jesus’ words are true. All of this will help you rekindle your love and trust in Jesus.



RELENTLESS PRAYER

We have a relentless commitment to prayer. As often as you can, use creative forms of prayer to be able to pray more consistently and more thoroughly for the church

Here are some types of prayer and ways to pray:

TYPES OF PRAYER

Intercessory

Bring your prayer requests before God, inviting Him to act in line with his character and desire. When you pray invite God to move in the world in the ways that He intended to at its creation.

Listening

Be silent in prayer so that you can listen to what God is saying to you. In John 15, Jesus calls us His friends and says that He will tell us what His Father is doing. Listening prayer can be powerful so make sure you do it in adherence with God's word and in the accountability of community.

Breath Prayer

When you breathe in, you take in oxygen that sustains your life in every aspect of your body. Pray with the rhythm of your breath and invite God's Spirit to infuse your mind, body, heart, and spirit with God's truth.

Warfare

Ephesians 6:12 tells us that there is a struggle, not against people (flesh and blood) but instead "against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." It is powerful to pray the words of scripture when praying warfare prayers, such as the Lord's prayer and Ephesians 6.

Trust

Proverbs 3:4-5 speaks about trusting in God and not leaning on your own understanding. When you pray a prayer of trust you remember that God is more than you in every way and that He knows the best way forward. The prayer of trust will help you to submit your will to God.

With Scripture

God's word is powerful and inspired by God. Read scripture aloud in prayer and the truth of it will seep deeper into your being and into the world. You can pray some of the well-known prayers of scripture, such as Psalm 51:10-12, Matthew 6:9-13, Ephesians 1:15-23, and Ephesians 3:14-21.

Lament

There are many great examples of the prayer of lament throughout the Psalms and in the book of Lamentations. Lament is speaking truthfully to God about the places where you have been hurt and disappointed by life and your perception of God's response to your prayers.

Lament can build up in your soul when you have been serving God and praying for specific items, but have not seen God move in the ways you expected. When you lament, God's Spirit cleans out the places where hurt has built up to despair or callousness and God gives you a renewed capacity to pray and to see where he is moving.

WAYS TO PRAY

An aspect of the creativity of God can be seen in the beauty and diversity of his creation. A wonderful example of this can be seen in the way he created each human being. Everyone is identified with incredible uniqueness and unbounded ability to express creativity with great diversity. So it follows that, God should invite you to use your creativity to connect with him. To bring all you are to God is exactly what Jesus called his disciples to do especially when he tells them fast and pray. (Matthew 6:16) When was the last time you fasted and prayed? Here are a few other ways to use your whole being in the act of prayer:

Prayer Walking

One of the most accessible ways of creative prayer is to take a prayer walk and there are three ways to do this. The first is to walk and lift-up your own prayer requests to God. The second is to walk through a neighborhood noticing the assets, such as schools and community centers, as well as needs and praying about them. The third way is to invite God's kingdom to come as you take each step around the neighborhood.

Writing

Another creative way for praying is to write out your prayers in a journal. Prayer journals create a record of what you have prayed for, the answers you have seen, and how God has changed your heart over time. In a group setting you can have people write out their prayers and display them together as a way of uniting people in their faith.

Using Images

There is the saying, "A picture is worth a thousand words." Often pictures can capture the heart of a prayer in a way that words do not. There are different ways to pray with images. One way is to create a unique picture of your prayers using paint or other materials. If your artistic ability keeps you from trying to capture your prayer through art, try making a collage by flipping through a magazine and cutting out pictures that connect with what you are praying. Sometimes the Spirit can lead us into a new understanding of the topic of our prayers as we reflect on our collage. Another way is to meditate on a painting and allow God to speak to you through the image. Henri Nouwen's book, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, is one of the best-known meditations on a famous work of art.



RELENTLESS LOVE

A special word to pastors - Love your congregation. You are going to ask them to do difficult things - love them. They have probably been at the church longer than you and have lost many members over the years. The people God has put before you to care for are just as important as the vision that God has put on your heart. Pray for them and walk with them.

A special word to congregants - Love your pastor. She or he is leading you through a difficult spiritual battle. They are human and won't be good at everything that their role demands of them. Give them grace in the areas where they struggle. Shut down anyone who complains about them by offering what you see them doing well. Acknowledge that your pastor makes sacrifices. Pray for them and walk with them.

WHY IS REVITALIZATION SO HARD?

Allowing Jesus into our midst will require the relentless removal of idols and sacred cows. What do you think needs to be addressed in your church? We are worshipping idols whenever something has become more important than following Jesus or has become a hindrance to inviting others to do so. A church is stuck until it has been honest to consider the hurdles to revitalization. We may need to be firm in dealing with issues as there may be spiritual resistance.

OUR GROWTH IS FOR OTHERS

Start in small ways where you can. Remember the truth of the mustard seed and the yeast. They are small but carry potential well beyond their size. Start with the ministry that is most accessible to you. This may be as simple as inviting neighbors to your next community meal. Remember to celebrate each small accomplishment.

Living into all that Jesus has for us while leading a small church will require that we do so wholeheartedly (Colossians 3:23). Our ministry can only be truly sustained if we make our walk with Jesus a priority. Only out of this reservoir can we minister to others. This call to lead small churches towards revitalization is a calling worthy of any diligent leader. Our mandate is to do it with a spirituality that is sustainable.



SEEING SMALL WITH KINGDOM EYES

How does God view small things in his kingdom? It may surprise you to discover how significant small things can be in God's eyes. So, what makes a small church unique?





REFLECT

Here is a reflective activity to do in small groups to help you think theologically about small churches.

Fill some jars with mustard seeds and yeast and hand them out to your small group. Now read the passage from Matthew 13, inviting people to handle the jars and consider the mustard seed and yeast as you read. Read the passage three times with some silence after each reading. Invite the hearers to listen to the passage while holding your church in your mind.

MATERIALS

- Small glass jars with lids
- Yeast
- Mustard Seeds
- Paper and pens or flip chart for writing down thoughts

What might God be saying to you with the above passage about your church?

After each time that you read the passage invite people to write down what God might be saying to you. What stands out each time the Scripture is read? Invite participants to share their thoughts with the group.

1. You may feel small like a mustard seed yet God has graced you with Kingdom possibilities.
2. It is hard to live into your Kingdom potential. See how the seed has to fall to the ground and die before growth is possible.
3. Transformation is also necessary. The yeast must be worked through the dough for it to be effective and it is the transformation caused by the yeast that produces the bread.
4. Your growth is not for you alone but for those around you. The mustard seed is tiny, but grows into a tree that birds can make a home in. Similarly, the yeast is small, but it causes the bread to rise and expand and the bread can now be shared with many people.

After a time of reflection, spend some time in prayer for your church.

DOING SMALL CHURCH WELL

Small churches often feel the pressure of seeking to do a whole array of ministries and outreach projects that require lots of energy and time. People will then feel guilty if they have not accomplished all the projects they set out to do or will see it as a reflection on their own faithfulness. In this first story we want to answer the question about the capacity of a small church to do ‘everything’ and look at how one church learned that partnership with other churches enabled them to share in mission together.

PARTNERS IN REVITALIZATION

By Lisa Brewitt

In September, Sidney Baptist Church celebrated 190 years of ministry. One of the founding CBOQ churches and located in the countryside 10 minutes north of Belleville, Sidney Baptist Church faces the challenge of being in the middle of farmland, isolated from towns and the city. It presently is 21 congregants strong!

How did your journey of revitalization begin?

I came to Sidney Baptist Church in December of 2017 to do four weeks of pulpit supply. I found one of the warmest, most welcoming churches I have ever stepped foot in. Yet, I also saw a handful of people, all over the age of 50, wondering if they had a future together. Things had gone sideways for them for a few years and they had lost a lot of people. I certainly didn’t think I had a future with them either but, after a clear and surprising call from God to stay, two years later I’m still here.

What inspired you? What continues to inspire you?

Love is inspiring—God’s love for his church and our love for him, each other and for the community. The congregation’s willingness to engage in prayer, discussion and serving keeps us all hopeful. If the people have a willing spirit, rebuilding is possible.



They are also teachable. If I didn't see this combination of love, willingness and responsiveness to God, I would not have had the same kind of hope for revitalization.

How did you and your congregation hear the voice of God in this process of revitalization?

We put everything on the table: closure, disappointment, hope, dreams, mistakes, lessons learned, visions of glory and defeat, fear of the work it would take, fear of change. Everything was fair game to name. Getting it out in the open before God and each other was important.

We also decided to make faithful discipleship (including reaching out) and the kingdom of God the priorities, not church growth.

We worked through the Thrive process as a framework for prayerful discussion. We listened to Scripture and to each other. We looked at our spiritual gifts, strengths and limitations, our identity in Christ and as a Baptist church, our context, including physical location and local demographics. When we hit a roadblock with no clear leading or ideas regarding outreach, we took a two month break to pray and to take some "field trips" to a sister church to see how they were doing outreach. Then we returned to our Thrive discussions and came up with 16 ideas for outreach but narrowed it down to two—one ongoing and one annual event.

What are your hopes for your church family?

One of the things that was apparent as we worked through Thrive is that we have a loving, healthy community that is committed to God and each other. That love moves us outward into the broader community. Our hope is that as we are led by the Spirit and share his love, others will see that we have something to give, something they can be part of and Someone to live for.

Was there a catalytic moment or has it been a slow process?

Definitely it has been a slow process but it has yielded much fruit. Working through the Thrive process helped us think differently. It opened up possibilities. When people can't see possibilities they lose hope. By listening to God and each other we also grew stronger as a community, gained the hope to continue and developed a plan for first steps and experiments in outreach.

There has been a deepening of commitment to God and each other as evidenced by six adherents becoming members, five long term believers taking steps of fuller obedience by being baptized, two members went with Canadian Baptist Ministries on a short-term mission trip and giving increased. People only do these things when they have hope of a future together.

When we think about the long-term future of the church, we are still in a vulnerable place. But we are walking with God and each other, reaching out to our community and being willing to live with the mystery of our future. It's a good and freeing place to be.

TIME TO REFLECT

Have you struggled to keep projects going that have always been part of your church family? What things might you stop, change or do differently? Is there a project that you can share or join in with another church?

Now let's consider the experience of another church before we come to a time of prayer.



CONNECTING SMALL CHURCHES TO THEIR COMMUNITIES

Lakefield Baptist Church has a deep desire to build relationships with those in their community and to share the love of Jesus with the people in their village. As they seek to follow Jesus, they have taken small steps to reach out and have been amazed at how God has used our efforts in ways they could not have anticipated.

A few year's ago, they noticed there were no children's summer day camps in the village. They developed a vision for 'Village Day Camp' to meet that need. The camp provided an opportunity for engagement with people outside of the church. They ran their first camp in the summer of 2015 and had 20 children attend.

Parents were invited to help out—providing snacks, leading an activity, making lunch or being a helper. In addition, local organizations and businesses were invited to get involved. Camp included a trip to the local ice cream parlour, library story time and guest entertainers. Relationships grew as they worked together to provide a fabulous camp experience. In response to its success, they ran two-day camps at Christmas and March Break.

By year three they were established as a place families looked to when making summer plans. They sensed an openness to faith-based programming and held a second Faith Camp that summer. By year five they were running four camps: Day Camp, Sports Camp, Faith Camp and Youth Camp—the latter two being faith-based—connecting with over 70 families.

The church began to welcome new families, but Sundays were too busy for many despite wanting to 'learn more about God'. From the 'camp' families, there emerged a core group who the Lord was clearly drawing to himself. In response, they gave families a tool to introduce them to family bible devotions. The Advent Jesse Tree project was based on the Advent Reading Plan of The Jesus Storybook Bible (JSB) by Sally Lloyd Jones. Each family received the JSB, a wooden tree, 24 ornaments - one for every story - simple questions, a candle and gummies. They called on individuals within the church to pray daily for an individual family. The

Advent Jesse Trees were very well received. Next they created the Life of Jesus series and an Easter series using the JSB. This meant families could read through the entire bible. On Easter Sunday one family joined them for the first time and unknowing sat directly in front of the lady who had been praying for them every day for the previous four months! In December 2018, they handed out an additional 25 Jesse Tree packages for a total of 50 families participating this Advent.

As individuals seek to grow in their faith and relationship with Jesus the church created new spaces. Friday Night Youth Groups and a Friday Morning Mom Group are two places that provide opportunity to gather weekly for topical faith-based discussions,

to open the word, and pray. They also have a lot of fun! Most who attend these groups do not attend Sunday morning service. Their relationship with them is growing strong and it has been a privilege for them to see God at work in people's lives.

Although it has not become a large church, Lakefield Baptist

Church has become a visible and relevant presence and a light in the lives of many around.

"Our church has not grown big," but Lakefield Baptist Church has become a visible and relevant presence and a light in the lives of many around.



TIME TO PRAY

Pause now for a time asking God to help you see the opportunities to serve and the wisdom to act rightly with them.

MISSIONAL AND REVITALIZATION IDEAS

When we are gripped by God's call to mission the next question we are faced with is "What shall we practically do?" Here are some ideas that will help spark your own imagination. Feel free to take from this list and shape your own project to fit the contours of your own situation.

WHAT IS REVITALIZATION REVOLUTION?

Our small churches are aware that the challenge of ministry is complex and requires vision and resources that many of our small churches believe are well beyond their abilities. Below are just a few ideas to get you started.

Here are some ideas:

- Join or initiate community engagement activities
- Serve in the local schools; Key Bible Clubs, home-work clubs
- Sponsor children to attend summer camp
- Host a meal and intentionally bringing together Christians (bridge builders) and unchurched. The home meal would be focused on social networks (family, friends coworkers).
- Host a movie night followed with discussion.
- Develop partnerships to strengthen your outreach; Athletes in Action or Youth for Christ, Sanctuary, The Dale, YMCA
- Pick up seniors or newcomers in your car on Sunday morning and bring them to church
- Invite young people from other churches to help your church run events and then go and help the church that helped yours
- Have a BBQ on the church lawn where everybody can see and join in
- Invite local community leaders (police, politicians, sports people, activists) to speak at men's breakfasts and women's breakfasts
- Visit in the local detention facility
- Help refugees get settled; Matthew House, Dixon Ministries, local settlement agencies
- Help out at local centres that serve needy people; Seaton House, Oasis Dufferin Community Centre, Scott Mission, Yonge St. Mission (Rick Tobias)
- Visit local First Nations communities; Oneida, Ohsweken, Curve Lake, Waskaganish, Mississauga
- Build showers in your church so you can invite visiting mission teams to stay over and help you run summer programs
- Ministry to seniors in nursing homes
- Take teams to clean up events at camps, or in the neighbourhood.
- Run a basketball/soccer clinic – partner with local sports teams – athletes – remember to invite business people and politicians
- Run a free car wash event
- Run a bike clinic/rodeo – partner with police and Canadian Tire – remember to invite newspapers
- Hold special events of your own and ask everybody to come – bring in a special speaker that would interest everybody in the community – ask CBOQ/CBWOQ/CBM/Associations/local businesses to

help – sell tickets

- Put on a big play each year – every year and invite everybody. Partner with a professional drama coach to train the children and youth and partner with other churches in community
- Run drama camps for local youth; hire drama teacher, run one or two week camp, produce a play, invite parents.
- Live stream your services and other events or run a radio ministry to the community .
- Hold one day impact events – depending upon community assets – hold a church picnic in a local

park – have bbq contests – sack races – and do it every year.

- Hold an weekend long event in cooperation with local community businesses and restaurants to highlight community assets.
- Homework club, volunteer at library, school
- Host neighbourhood street parties,
- Volunteer at neighbourhood services, ministries
- Host concerts, movie nights, theatre
- Host a book club.



Find out more at baptist.ca/revolution.

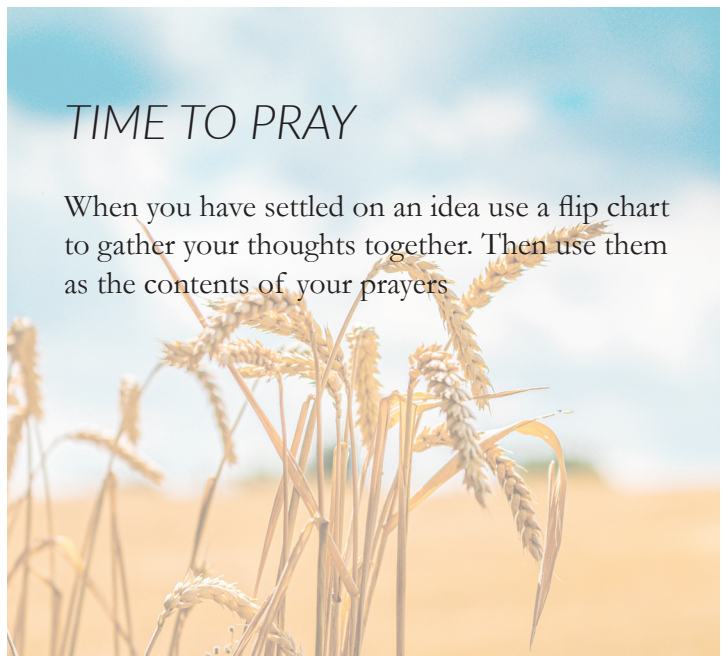
TIME TO REFLECT

From the list of ideas what things could you do? Who will you need to help you. Consider now putting together a team of people who will plan to do something tangible. Try to answer these questions:

1. What project are you going to do?
2. When is it going to start?
3. Who will be involved?
4. What will be the values that guide you?
5. What do you need to make it happen?

TIME TO PRAY

When you have settled on an idea use a flip chart to gather your thoughts together. Then use them as the contents of your prayers



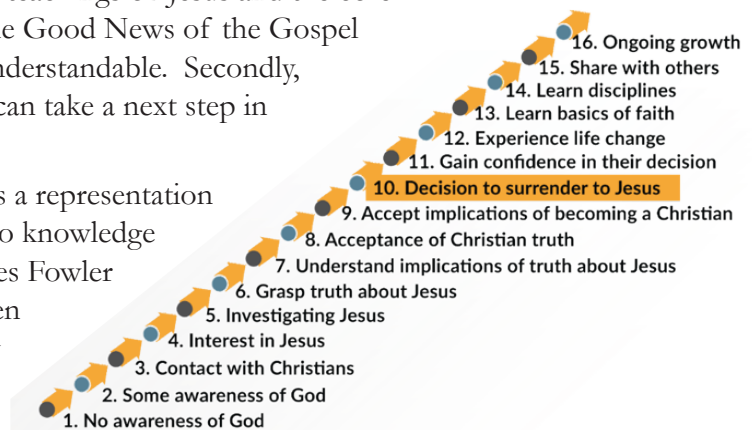
EVANGELISM AND THE FORMATION PATHWAY

Your church is called to make disciples of Jesus. Church revitalization begins as congregations become clear about their mandate to make disciples and as each congregant takes their next step towards Christ.

Every person's journey to Christ, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is slightly different. Despite this difference there are often some common faith steps in a person's formation pathway.

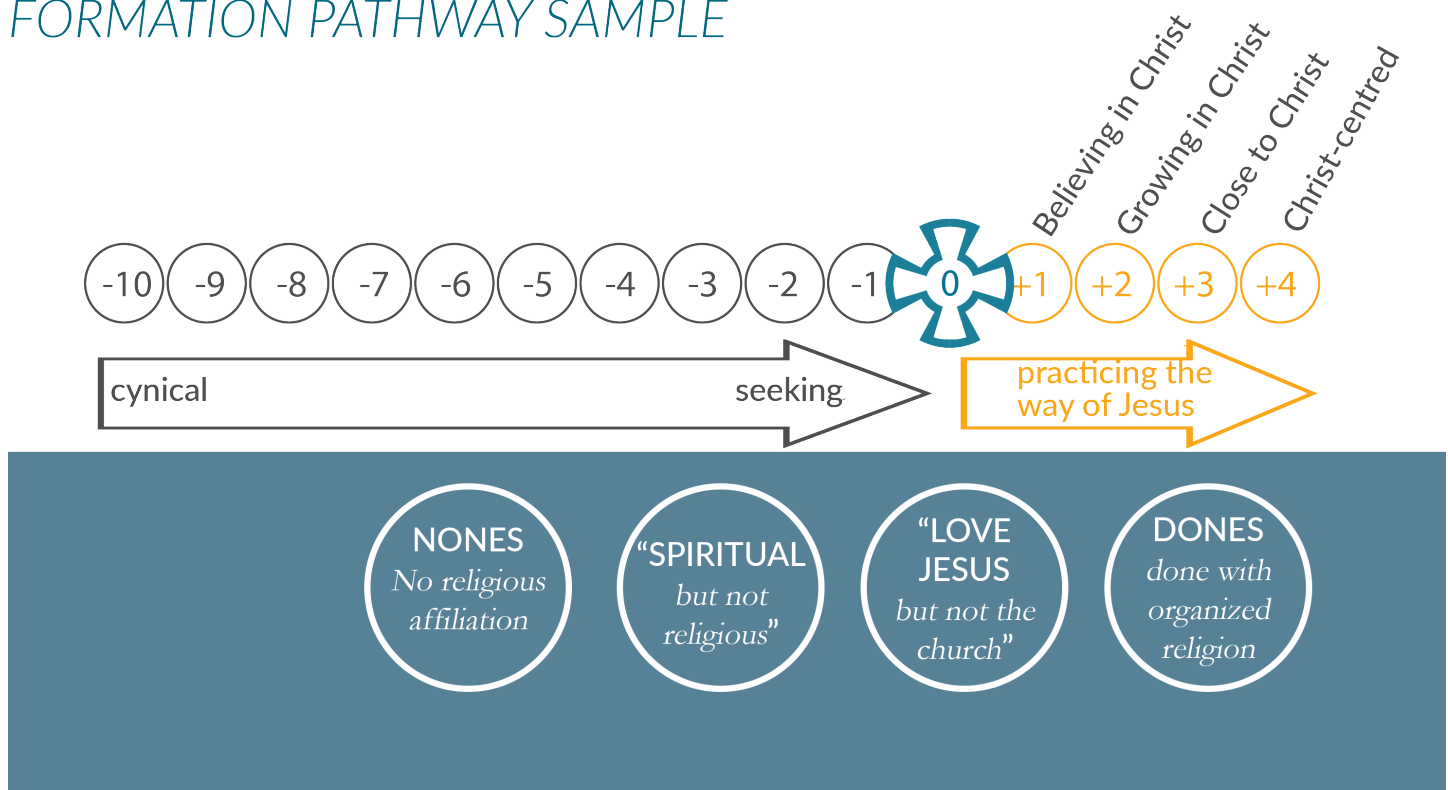
Building a culture of discipleship and faith formation involves two important tasks. First, congregations need to safely build spaces for people to explore the life and teachings of Jesus and the core tenants of Christianity. Everyone needs to hear the Good News of the Gospel in a language and a setting that is accessible and understandable. Secondly, congregations need to be clear about how people can take a next step in their faith development.

The *Engel Scale* was developed by James F. Engel as a representation of the journey someone might take from having no knowledge of God to the place of being Christ-centred. James Fowler wrote about *7 Stages of Faith* and others have written about *Pathways to Spiritual Growth*. While there may be different ways of naming the experience of people maturing in their faith what we know is that churches need to be intentional about evangelism, building a discipleship culture and developing a formation pathway.



"We don't have a 'missional' problem. We have a discipleship problem." - Mike Breen

FORMATION PATHWAY SAMPLE

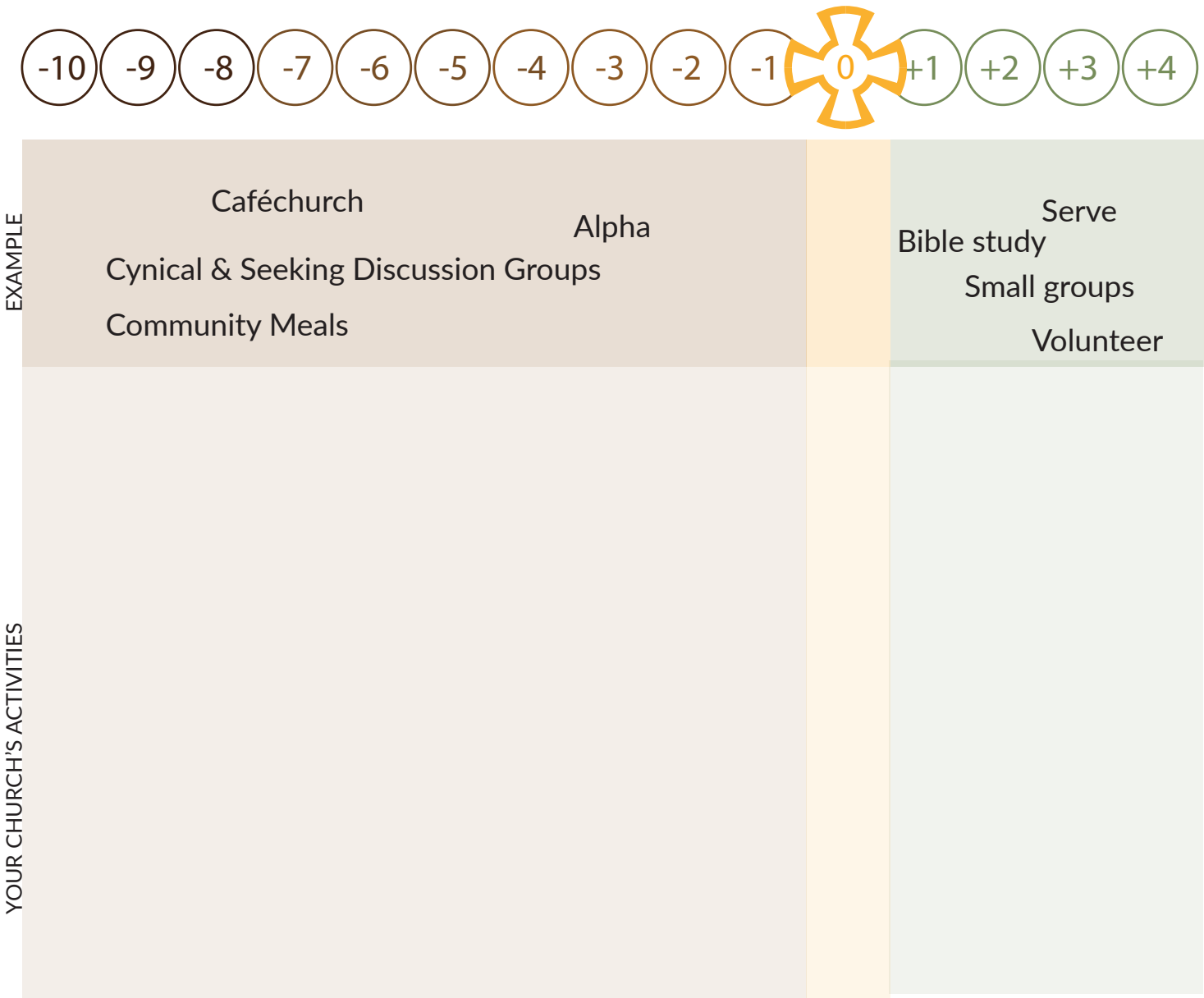


FORMATION PATHWAY & CHURCH ACTIVITIES

It can be somewhat sobering for a congregation to examine where it spends its time and resources. Where you spend your efforts as a congregation what you believe about God’s call for you. The following activity can help a congregation assess where it spends its efforts.

- As you chart your activities on the diagram below consider the following:
- Do you provide spaces for those with little awareness of Jesus to explore the life, teachings and salvation of Christ?
 - Do you provide new believers with opportunities to take a next step in their discipleship?
 - What are you doing to help committed believers take that next step in their faith?

A helpful way to consider these questions is to identify your intended audience or participant for each activity that your church provides.



TIME TO REFLECT

It is important to provide opportunities for people to serve in projects and events, whether Christian or not, as taking part can bring a sense of connection and belonging to the church community. These are the connections that can lead to being connected with Jesus. What part can you play right now in providing opportunities for people to serve and move closer to walking with Christ Jesus?

TIME TO PRAY

Jesus encouraged his disciples to have child-like faith in their relationship with God. What may look small to us is limitless to God. Take a moment now to compile a prayer list of people you are in contact with who need to experience the love of Jesus. These could be family, friends, co-workers etc., When you have your list pray through each person, asking God to bless them. Turn to the Scripture Matthew 9:37. Ask the Lord to send more people to serve the Lord in and through your church.

ADDITIONAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS

How do you as a disciple of Jesus, engage with others in the categories on the Engel Scale?

How does your congregation facilitate conversations to help people take the next step in their faith?

DEALING WITH CHANGE

IMPORTANT UPCOMING TRENDS FOR SMALL CONGREGATIONS

The times, they are a-changing, but all is not lost. Preparing ahead can help your church adapt. What trends do small congregations need to pay attention to today to faithfully prepare for tomorrow?

1. INCREASING URBANIZATION

- 1911 = 45% of Canada lived in urban centres
- 2011 = 81% of Canada lived in urban centres
- New downtowns are being developed.
- Nearly 1/3 of Canada lives in Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver
- Peripheral municipalities that surround urban cores are growing

Who is moving into your neighbourhood?
How are shifting urbanization trends an opportunity for our congregation to live out its mission?

2. CHANGING CANADIAN DEMOGRAPHICS

- Canada has an aging population
- 1970's = fewer than 1 in 10 Canadians were age 65 or older
- 2000's = 1 in 6 Canadians are age 65 or older
- Life expectancy in Canada, which averages about 80 years, is among the world's highest.
- More Canadians are over 65 than under the age of 15.
- Canada is increasingly diverse

How do changing Canadian demographics provide an opportunity for our congregation to live out its mission?

3. TECHNOLOGY

With online giving, online viewing, sermon podcasts, online volunteer scheduling, virtual volunteer training, etc. what do we need to consider as we gather as the church?

How do we leverage the uniqueness of small congregations (hospitality, togetherness, sense of belonging) as we navigate the ever-changing dynamics and implications of technology?

4. TRADITIONALISM, CHRISTIAN IDOLS & FAITHFULNESS

How do we honour the past but not idolize traditionalism?

What do we do with false religion that passes as "Christianity"?

How do we equip our people to live abundantly and serve passionately and purposely?



5. *CHANGING ECONOMIC REALITIES*

- 1980 = 60% of Toronto is middle-income
- 2015 = 28% of Toronto is middle-income
- Like many developed countries Canada has a declining manufacturing sector and increasing lower-paying service sector jobs.
- There is currently an increasing divide between rich and poor in Canada

How might the growing divide between rich and poor in Canada be an opportunity for our congregation to live out the gospel?

How might we need to prepare for these new realities?

6. *BUILDINGS*

- Many smaller congregations are struggling to maintain and modernize their buildings.
- Governments and developers have identified church buildings as the largest underutilized capital asset in Canada. Most churches only use their space 5% to 7% of the time. It has been stated often that any market place employee would be fired immediately if they only utilized 5% of their organizations key asset.
- As a result of some of these changing dynamics congregations are...
 1. Removing the pews to put in chairs to make the space multi-use.
 2. Turning their facilities into community centres and rental spaces during the week.
 3. Selling their buildings to meet in homes or other rented spaces.

What do we need to consider regarding the use of our space?

What could our congregation do to navigate increasing building costs?

4. *PAID PASTORAL LEADERS*

- There are new realities regarding the number of people that are committing their lives to full-time paid pastoral leadership. There are growing challenges for smaller congregations being able to afford full-time pastoral leaders.
- There is an increasing number of Christian leaders that are bi-vocationally or co-vocationally by choice or by necessity.

What conversations might your congregation need to have now that will help build your capacity for the future regarding the professionalization of clergy?

5. *TAX EXEMPTION*

- The church in Canada has been blessed (or cursed) with tax breaks. It is conceivable that there could come a time when congregations do not receive property tax exemption, clergy deduction allowances or are unable to offer tax receipts.

What might your congregation need to do now to prepare for the possible implications of not having tax breaks?

What questions do you need to pay attention to today that could position your congregation to make a Kingdom impact for the years to come?

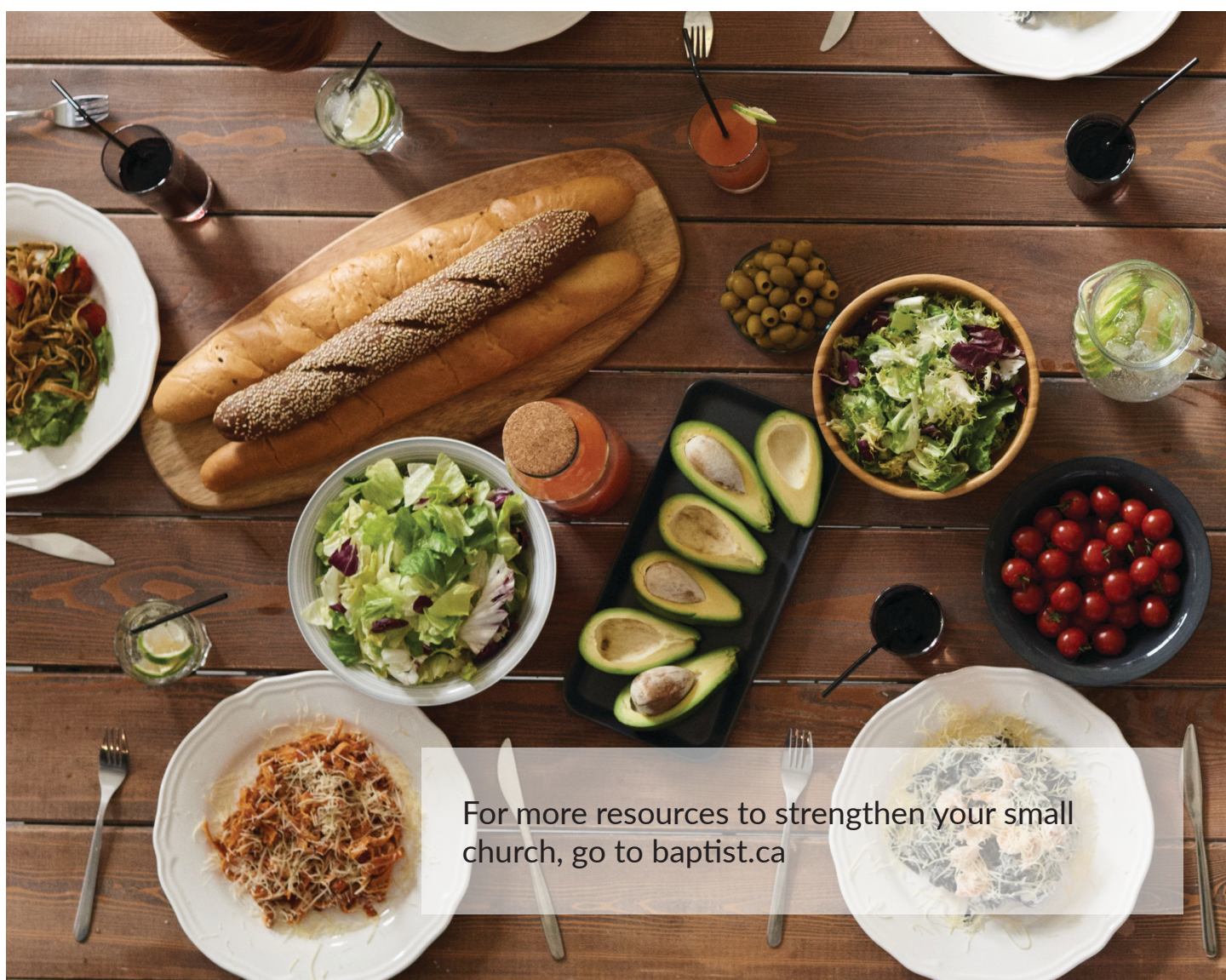
We are not called to live with fear, anxiety, or to solve tomorrow's problems. We are called to be faithful to God today. When you consider the issues before the church today, what gives you hope?

SUMMARY

The role of revitalizing small churches is a hot topic today as many denominations are coming to terms with the effects of serious decline. If you respond with the right heart and tools, you can see the present situation of decline turned around. This guide has sought to:

- make you aware of some of the major issues in revitalization.
- provide a map of activities that will help you to discuss the issues you face as a church.
- inspire you to take steps towards revitalization.

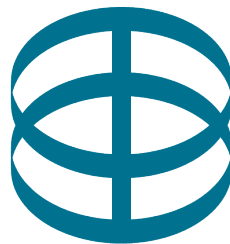
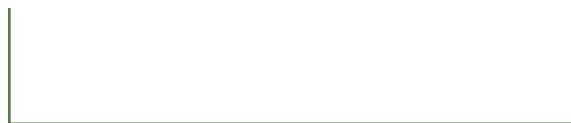
Using the prompts in this guide, revitalization will be within reach as you pray, discuss and evaluate where you need encouragement to move forward. We hope that as you endeavor to do this, it will become a greater joy for you to share the living hope you have in Christ.





Other CBOQ Resources to help your small church:

- **Why Baptist?**
Who we are as Baptists and what makes us unique.
baptist.ca/about
- **Thrive**
Thrive is a conversation guide, designed to assist your congregation in listening, discerning, responding to and resting in God's unique calling.
baptist.ca/thrive
- **Cafechurch**
Cafechurch is coffee with a conscience. It's the fresh expression of community in coffee shops or your own venue dealing with issues from a faith perspective. Find a welcome for everyone—whether a church-goer or not!
baptist.ca/cafechurch
- **Intergenerational Worship Resources**
Planning template for intergenerational worship.
baptist.ca/church-development



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