

ReGenerate!

A Strategy for Revitalization in
Seventh-day Adventist Churches



BRAD CAULEY
& GARY MOYER

ReGenerate!

*A Strategy for Church Revitalization
in the Seventh-day Adventist Church*

Authors: Brad Cauley & Gary Moyer

Cover Design and Inside Layout: Claudia C. Pech Moguel

Available from

AdventSource

5120 Prescott Avenue

Lincoln, NE 68506

402.486.8800 | AdventSource.org

©2023 Brad Cauley

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the prior written permission of the copyright holder.

Printed in the United States of America.

ISBN# 978-1-57756-027-2

Contents

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION v

Chapter 1

The Need for Church Revitalization 1



SECTION 2

BIBLICAL BASIS FOR COACHING FOR REVITALIZATION 11

Chapter 2

Coaching Principles in Old Testament Wisdom Literature 13

Chapter 3

Coaching Principles Practiced by Jesus
in the Gospel of Luke 21

Chapter 4

Coaching Principles in the Life of Barnabas
in The Acts of the Apostles 31

Chapter 5

The Relationship Between the Personal Development
of Others and Church Growth in our Scriptural Search 39



SECTION 3

WHAT OTHERS SAY ABOUT LEADING FOR CHURCH REVITALIZATION	45
--	----

Chapter 6

The Revitalization Attitude.....	47
----------------------------------	----

Chapter 7

Key Ingredients Needed for Church Revitalization.....	59
---	----

Chapter 8

Coaching Pastors and Church Revitalization.....	75
---	----



SECTION 4

APPLYING THESE CHURCH REVITALIZATION PRINCIPLES.....	91
--	----

Chapter 9

Church Revitalization Project Initiative	93
--	----

Chapter 10

Where Do We Go from Here?	121
---------------------------------	-----



Appendix A.....	137
-----------------	-----

Appendix B.....	139
-----------------	-----

Appendix C.....	141
-----------------	-----

REFERENCE LIST.....	143
---------------------	-----

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

It certainly looked that way. Imagine yourself as a young child wondering why virtually everyone around you has two arms and two legs, but you have *none*; only one partial foot attached to your hip.

Born in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, on December 4, 1982, Nick Vujicic entered the world with a rare disease called Tetra-Amelia Syndrome, a rare disorder characterized by the absence of all four limbs. Due to other serious medical complications associated with this devastating syndrome, including underdeveloped lungs, most babies are stillborn or die shortly after birth. Nick was one of the lucky ones that survived. Or was he? Would life be a blessing or a curse?

As if just struggling to make it through each day was not enough, Nick was often bullied at school. Soon he spiraled into depression, so far that he attempted suicide. Can you blame him? He was losing his hold on hope.

So, what happened to Nick? How does his story end? Just Google his name and you'll find out; the good news—no, the *great* news—is that his story has *not* ended! Today Nick Vujicic is a motivational speaker, evangelist, businessman, and author, and has written numerous books. He's also a husband, a father of four, and one of our world's most sought-after speakers. He swims, surfs, and plays golf.

One thing Nick *doesn't* do is embrace hopelessness. Along the way, he changed his mindset and, as a result, his life. And just in case you're tempted to think that Nick Vujicic is just one of those rare, highly exceptional people with superhuman powers, keep searching the internet and you'll find the names of others who had Tetra-Amelia Syndrome who, like Nick, did not just survive, but made a difference in the world.

Maybe your church appears hopeless. The congregation is aging out and shrinking; you haven't had new converts in years; the baptistry has cobwebs and bugs; the building is slowly crumbling. Although it may feel like your

church is on its *last leg*, let me encourage you: THERE IS HOPE! Nick Vujicic has *no legs* (or arms), but just as he has thrived, so can your church. Turning declining and plateaued churches around is NOT impossible, but rather very probable with the right ingredients. It is the working of God.

This book is for anyone and everyone who wants to see God turn their church around, however, pastors, scholars, researchers, and very knowledgeable lay people may be among those who appreciate this book most, as it delves into available research on the topic of church revitalization and recommends a path forward for growth.

Chapter 1

The Need for Church Revitalization

Sea stars are amazing creatures with an extraordinary ability to suffer the loss of arms and regenerate what they have lost. According to University of California Santa Barbara ScienceLine (2004), “some species have even been observed to complete the process in reverse: regrowing an entire body from a lost arm. To do this the sea star will store nutrients in the arm until it is able to regrow its mouth.”



With local church bodies experiencing a near-severing also, where may we find hope? As Jesus says, if God cares for animals, how much more does He care for us? If God can give a sea star this incredible ability, what will He do for our declining churches with the right “nutrients?”

A Reality Check

But first, let’s get a reality check. Just as it is appropriate for a medical doctor to share news of a patient’s disease onset, it is likewise a sign of good leadership to name the illness or actual state of the church. Conversely, good leadership starts by clarifying what the reality is. Let’s take a look, shall we?

Recent (2018-2019) research by Pew Research Center, GALLUP®, LifeWay® Research, and *The State* reveal that United States church attendance was down significantly from previous surveys, and has continued to decline yearly (“Attendance at Religious Services,” 2019; Earl, 2019; Ellis, 2018; Jones, 2019; Newport, 2018; Saad, 2018). For example, one 2019 study showed 60 percent of Protestant churches plateaued or declining (Earl, 2019), yet others

maintained that this figure was actually 80 percent, with the majority being churches in decline (Bird & Ferguson, 2018; Cheyney, 2016a).

While Malphurs (2013) averred 80-85 percent of American churches were in decline or plateaued, he extrapolated that 80 percent of pastors are unable to lead in church renewal. Ouch! Alarming, the decline in church attendance occurred while the country's population increased by nearly 6 percent from 2010 to 2018, per the United States Census Bureau ("U.S. Population Up 5.96% since 2010," 2018).

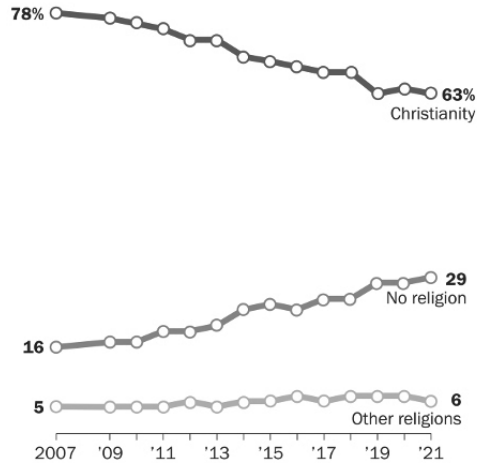
Furthermore, fewer Americans each year believed in God, prayed, studied or meditated on the Bible, or lived out other Christian discipleship practices. According to its "Attendance at Religious Services" study, Pew Research Center found a strong correlation between church attendance and the following: belief in God, frequency of prayer, scripture study, scripture meditation, moral guidance, etc.

These coinciding trends—whether church leaders ignore or proactively engage them—are tantamount to a crisis of eternal significance. Therefore, allowing this crisis of broad church attendance decline to go largely unanswered may put at risk the fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:45-49; John 20:21-23; Acts 1:8).

Cheyney (2016b) notes a heightened emphasis on church planting during the past two decades; however, there has not been "corresponding attention given to the revitalization and renewal of our [existing] churches"

In U.S., roughly three-in-ten adults now religiously unaffiliated

% of U.S. adults who identify with ...



Note: Those who did not answer are not shown.
Source: Data from 2020-21 based on Pew Research Center's National Public Opinion Reference Surveys (NORS), conducted online and by mail among a nationally representative group of respondents recruited using address-based sampling. All data from 2019 and earlier from the Center's random-digit-dial telephone surveys, including the 2007 and 2014 Religious Landscape Studies. See Methodology for details.
"About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults Are Now Religiously Unaffiliated"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

(p. 45). As a result of many good leaders being engaged in church planting, there is a cataclysmic leadership deficit in plateaued and declining churches.

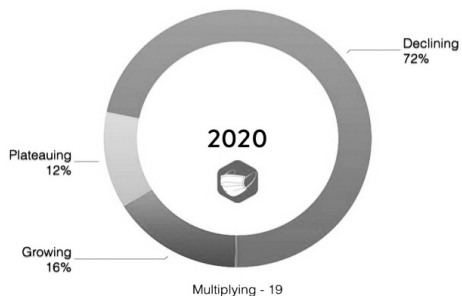
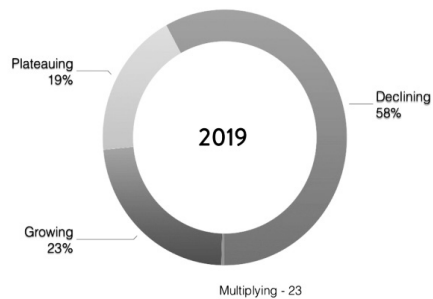
Cheyney (2016a) also exclaims that church planting efforts will be hindered in the absence of developing healthier, renewed churches which may sponsor future plants. Consequently, church revitalization is critical to the impact of Christianity in the United States. There is now an even greater need for a revitalization focus following the Covid pandemic, which severely reduced worship service attendance ubiquitously. Many churches today still have not recovered to their pre-pandemic attendance average.

What about the North American Seventh-day Adventist Church? Highlighting the enormity of church decline, Burrill (2004) enumerated this figure to be 80-85 percent for the Adventist Church specifically, including plateauing churches.

Thankfully, we do have more recent and scientific figures to relate Russell Burrill's estimation from 20 years ago; the following is a graph provided by eAdventist (a church membership and management platform) on the North American Division the year prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

If the declining and plateauing churches are combined, 77 percent of Adventist churches are plateauing or declining. This is inclusive of non-English-speaking churches, which traditionally and currently fare much better. As if this was not bad enough, take a look at the number the year the pandemic arrived in the U.S.

The combined total for 2020 is 84 percent. Sadly, many SDA churches have not recovered to their pre-pandemic attendance levels. Is this acceptable? Of course not! God has a plan.



This introduction sets the stage to discovering keys for church revitalization. In other words, what are the key factors for churches in decline or in a plateau to begin to grow again? Although your context may be different, this investigation sought to address reasons and remedies applicable across the board. Along the journey, this book will share stories of churches which have been revitalized and will uncover how. It will also detail an investigation which found answers to this burning need.

Whereas I (Brad) may have served as the key investigator for this revitalization research endeavor, Gary was an instrumental coauthor and friend who helped this work come to fruition. Therefore, to simplify your reading experience, Gary will be specifically named when it is not me sharing. Both Gary and I served together in the Carolina Conference, and it is with pleasure we took upon this joint venture.

Description of the Ministry Context

At the time this initiative took place, Gary served as vice president for administration and executive secretary for the Carolina Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. He served as Brad's coach from 2017 to 2020, and came alongside him as Brad took up the mission of researching and then undergoing a church revitalization initiative. They met monthly to discuss findings and strategy. As part of this process, Gary assisted Brad's efforts by holding him accountable to see this process through.

Brad served as church revitalization director (among other roles) for the Carolina Conference from July 2012 to December 2020.

The primary setting for implementation of this investigation was within the Carolina Conference. However, this investigation included a secondary setting—other declining Adventist churches across the United States.

Brad particularly wanted to do this because he had heard people say things such as, "Well, it is easier to turn churches around in the Bible belt. You cannot do that in my territory." They would then proceed to share how they limit God's power to change lives, and therefore churches, where they live.

It is apparent in Scripture that the same Holy Spirit who is alive in one place in the world is alive everywhere, including where *you* live. That is not to say the approach used in one place will effectively reach the particular demographic God has entrusted to you, but the same God can use multiple

and varied methods to revitalize and revive churches across the country and around the world.

The Carolina Conference is comprised of North and South Carolina. As church revitalization director, Brad was responsible for leading the charge for renewal of declining and plateauing churches. He was responsible for creating agendas and follow-through for the Carolina Conference Church Revitalization Committee, of which all four Carolina Conference officers are members, along with other conference leaders and church members.

Moreover, Brad was responsible for determining which indicators (i.e., statistics) helped reveal church decline. Beginning in 2013, the Church Revitalization Committee studied reports of church accessions (i.e., baptisms and individuals becoming members by a profession of faith), tithe, and attendance. It then selected those churches in severe decline to undertake a monitored Natural Church Development (NCD) process.

NCD is a process by which churches may ascertain a snapshot of their health, therefore helping them know how to proceed to becoming healthier churches. The focus of NCD is to increase the health of the church, especially the least healthy areas inhibiting growth. Healthy churches are growing churches.

For this process described above, each church received an NCD coach to assist them in the processing of their results and discussion of next steps. Per the request of this committee, the pastors of these churches gave progress reports every six months; thus, a level of accountability was incorporated. Churches remained in this follow-up process until conclusive signs of turnaround had begun.

However, these churches did not receive a more comprehensive revitalization process as contained in *Steps to a Vibrant Church: A Turnaround Guide for Churches in a Plateau or Decline* until 2019. This book presents the NCD process as a possible avenue to aid churches in health and subsequent growth. Although the previously monitored process provided an NCD coach, it was not as systematic as *Steps to a Vibrant Church* sets forth.

Are Churches Really Declining?

Many leaders have stated that the majority of churches are in decline or have plateaued. However, more research was needed to determine if this was,

in fact, the reality. Therefore, I calculated the five-year attendance mean for churches in the Carolina Conference for 2008-2012 and 2013-2017 using annual average attendance data. Only churches which had reported attendance for a minimum of three years for each five-year period were evaluated. A total of 77 English-speaking churches were found to fit this criterion. The two five-year averages were compared, and the difference was measured. Of them, 43 had a lower average in the more recent five-year period representing a majority (55.84 percent).

When analyzing the numbers from the Carolina Conference, however, we find many conferences with a higher number of churches in decline, based on numbers reported to the North American Division. For instance, for a similar time frame, the Northern New England Conference experienced 78 percent of churches in decline. (This is where I have served since January 2021.) It is of particular concern that these stats represent pre-Covid reality. The pandemic decimated most churches' worship service attendance.

For the above-mentioned investigation in the Carolina Conference, the discovery of declining attendance in the majority of English-speaking churches was disturbing, as simultaneously, the local population was growing in most of these communities. These results were inclusive of the prior efforts of the Church Revitalization Committee with declining churches.

If the tide of attendance decline was to be stemmed in the Carolina Conference and beyond, greater efforts were needed. This challenge was not limited to congregations in North and South Carolina, but was prevalent across the United States ("Attendance at Religious Services," 2019; Burrill, 2004; Earl, 2019; Jones, 2019; Malphurs, 2013; Newport, 2018; Olson, 2008; Saad, 2018). These churches needed revitalization, but many of their pastors lacked the support essential for revitalization to occur.

A Plan Set Forth

First off, this cannot be overstated: All methods are otiose without the blessing of God—the presence of the Holy Spirit (Clouzet, 2011). Beyond inviting God's Spirit to turn around latent churches, the task of this project is three-fold. The plan was to develop, implement, and evaluate a coaching process with a sampling of pastors who led churches with declining attendance in the Carolina Conference. And since the challenge was not limited

to congregations in the Carolinas, a sampling of other Adventist pastors outside the Carolina Conference but within the United States was included to strengthen the investigation. Some of these churches were in areas some deem to be “post-Christian.” What does post-Christian mean? John O’Sullivan (2013) shares this in the *National Review*:

A post-Christian society is not merely a society in which agnosticism or atheism is the prevailing fundamental belief. It is a society rooted in the history, culture, and practices of Christianity but in which the religious beliefs of Christianity have been either rejected or, worse, forgotten.

In this initiative, I first provided a revitalization process for pastors to lead churches as contained in *Steps to a Vibrant Church*; I concurrently came alongside the pastors through coaching.

Overview of Book

The authors of this book have discovered that in life, as well as in turning churches around, it is not only doing the right things but doing the right things at the right time, and with the right leadership. What does this all mean? That is what this book seeks to uncover.

Before searching for answers or developing any strategies, one must start with the source of all wisdom and blessing—the Word of God. In order to understand and tackle the challenge of church decline, we listen to what God has to say before listening to the thoughts of people, no matter how good or well-intentioned those thoughts may be. Therefore, the next chapter begins in the Bible.

Afterward, chapter three further strengthens the investigation by hearing how God has led others. This analysis of current literature will seek to elucidate a suitable remedy.

After addressing the need and hearing from God and others, we will spend some time honing in on a crucial area impacting our ability to lead churches into growth: our mentality. Then we will share a church revitalization initiative occurring from 2018-2020 which was based upon the findings from scripture and church revitalization experts. Finally, we will share our

discoveries and set forth recommendations to effectively accomplish church revitalization.

Definitions of Terms

There exist some recurring terms within this book which are described here to establish a clearer understanding throughout. Although some of the italicized terms may be described more exactly elsewhere, they are defined below as they relate to the particular context and objective of this research.

As Keith E. Webb (2015) puts it, *coaching* is “listening and asking powerful questions to draw out from leaders what God had put in” (p. 22). I was the *coach* or the one serving in the coaching role for the implementation of this project. For this project, coaching was advocated as the remedy for church decline, but, more precisely, coaching for the purpose of church revitalization.

It is helpful then to define *church decline* and *church revitalization* as they are used as well. Church decline refers to a church’s diminishing vitality, which is best reflected or measured by a decrease in average weekly worship service attendance. Similarly, *church revitalization* occurs when a body of believers experience greater vitality reflected in an increase in average weekly worship service attendance.

Moreover, this book focuses a great deal on what differentiates between a turnaround pastor (TAP) and non-turnaround pastor (NTAP). A *TAP* is summarized by Malpurs and Penfold (2014) as follows:

- Scoring mid- to high D or I or D/I combination on the DiSC® personal profile
- Passionate and visionary
- Have a mentor/coach more often than not
- More outgoing with good people skills
- More innovative than traditional
- More energetic (this is essential)
- “Young in ministry,” regardless of their biological age
- Better team players
- Better at delegating
- Better at training new leaders
- Focused and determined

- Able to embrace necessary change and willing to pay the price to do so
- Good conflict resolution skills
- Better than average communicators (vision and direction as well as preaching)
- Passionate use of their primary spiritual gifts and ability to empower others to use theirs (pp. 95-96)

In contrast, *NTAPs* can be described as follows when compared to their counterparts:

- Scoring higher in S and C on the DiSC® profile and therefore less outgoing.
- Less clarity, passion, focus, determination, risk-taking, and energy.
- Less likely to have a mentor/coach.
- Less empowering.
- Less able to clearly articulate the direction of churches.

Additionally, a plateaued or declining church will be much more likely to experience a turnaround when led by TAPs rather than NTAPs. Similarly, NTAPs are more likely to lead during a decline in average weekly worship service attendance. While most pastors may be characterized as NTAPs, around 10 percent of all pastors are TAPs. However, this study sought to ascertain how much of the other 90 percent of pastors with God's blessing would be able to turn churches around by having a qualified coach.

Summary

This chapter has introduced the unquestionable challenge of church revitalization in exclusively English-speaking Adventist churches in the United States. We believe, however, that what is contained in this work is applicable to churches across the board experiencing decline. It is the authors' hope that this work will provide insight, inspiration, and direction to church leaders who desire to proactively engage in church revitalization.