

RETOOL, REFOCUS, RELAUNCH

HOW TO RESET, REIMAGINE AND RESTART A CHURCH

By Brad Ransom

“Relaunch” is a word widely used today to describe trying to “start over” and get a declining church on the right path to health and growth. This is what we will talk about during this seminar. We will be talking about how to take a struggling church and create forward momentum and get your church moving forward.

One of the biggest advantages a church plant or new church has is the opportunity to start fresh; design things from scratch, eliminate the “sacred cows” and **create** DNA. On the other hand, one of the biggest problems for existing churches is having existing DNA that you have try and **alter**.

Let me draw you a verbal picture to begin with and see if any of these things describe our situation: stale, stagnant, apathetic, dry, unexciting, unconcerned, indifferent, stuck, lethargic, lazy, boring, dead. If any of these terms describe your church, you definitely need to reset, reimagine and restart; but how? There are actually three levels of **church condition** I’m going to talk about today. The model you would possibly use would depend on where your church currently is. Obviously, every church is unique and has a different starting place.

Let me warn you, **I'm cutting to the chase** and there's actually a lot of ground work that could be laid but for times sake, let me give you **three church conditions or starting points** that will dictate which model you may need to think about.

1. **Plateau.** If your church is just spinning its wheels, not seen any growth, is just maintaining, and people are just "content," you probably can start with model 1.
2. **Decline.** If your church is heading south; attendance is less this year than it was last year and the year before, people are generally unsettled, you might need to look at model 2.
3. **Life-support.** Attendance is a handful and people have given up hope and know it's only a matter of time. Most people are content with just "us four and no more" you probably need to look at the 3rd and most drastic model.

Do you have your situation in mind? Every stage will include the steps for model 1. Model 2 will include some additional steps and model 3 even more. So if you're writing these things down, get ready because we're about to blast off! I am going to have to move very quickly.


Plateau Stage: Model 1

- Prayer- don't skip this step
- Waiting and hearing from God- God wants your church to be healthy, reach people and grow. Trust Him to lead you.
- Begin developing the broad strokes
 - Determining Core Values: Core values are very important. Please

don't dismiss this or say, "Oh we know our core values! Our core values are the Word of God!" Yes, that probably is one core value but there needs to be more on the list than just the Bible. Without trying to tell you what your core values are, let me give you a few examples to get you started.

-  Biblical truth
-  Evangelism
-  Discipleship
-  Children
-  Leadership development

Determining your core values and communicating them to your congregation is an important step in setting a direction for your church.

- Writing mission statement (what)
 -  Again, don't just dismiss this and say, "We know what our mission is. We don't need to write it out." Yes, you do. You need to write it out, put it in your bulletin, hang it on a plaque in the foyer, and remind your people of your mission every 30 days. Your mission statement is the white lines on the road to health.

Many people struggle with trying to develop a mission statement that accurately identifies their church. I don't want to oversimplify it, but honestly, there is a scriptural statement that I encourage churches to include in their mission statement- Matthew 28:19-20. You can paraphrase it succinctly by saying, "Our church exists to lead people to Christ, disciple

them and lead them to win and disciple others.”

Your mission statement should be one sentence and can be memorized and communicated by every member of your congregation quickly and easily


- Writing vision statement (how)

- ✚ Your vision statement basically expands your mission statement by telling how you plan to execute your mission statement. It could read something like, “We exist to lead people to Christ by creating a culture of friendliness and love even to unlovable people. We further plan to disciple them by offering one on one discipleship training, accountability and small group meetings. We wish to win families so our plan includes strategies for all ages.”

- Move VERY slowly
- Begin casually talking about change
- Bringing leaders on board (building your team)
 - This can be somewhat simple to super complex!
 - Assessing your current leaders
 - I’m glad everyone is sitting down... The Pastor must also be evaluated. Not every pastor is equipped and able to lead a church in revitalization. I would suggest that every leader, especially the pastor take two specific assessments- the DISC Personality Portrait Predictor and the Myers Briggs Temperament Indicator. Both of these can be taken online for free.
 - Go to humanmetrics.com and click on “Personality Test- Jung Briggs Myers Types.”

- Then go to discpersonalitytesting.com and follow the instructions.
- If you don't have any experience in interpreting these instruments, it may seem a little like you're looking at a foreign language but they will offer some interpretations but they are not directly aimed at pastoral leadership leading a church turnaround so you may need some help interpreting them.
- Spiritual gifts assessment
- Making sure the right people are in the right ministries
- Spreading key ministries and leadership roles to different people.

One of the most common mistakes smaller churches make is putting all the leadership in the hands of a few people. This creates a leadership bubble that is difficult to break. It creates a sense of entitlement and "territory." That is NEVER good!

 - What would happen if a key leader dies or moves?
 - What would happen if the pastor leaves?
 - Use different "anchors" so the entire ministry doesn't rise and fall on one or two personalities
- Casting Vision
 - Leading others to see the need
 - Sharing the vision
 - a. The vision must be clear
 - b. There must be unity (everyone single person agrees??)
- Focus on excellence- deciding on what is most important
 -  Kill/Continue/Create
- Plan your strategy

Decline Stage: Model 2

Everything I just mentioned for model 1 plus...

- Deeper evaluation of key areas
 - ✚ Visitor tracking- How many first time, second time, third time visitors, etc.
- Strategic planning to drive more first time visitors
- Deeper look into esthetics
- Parking, building condition, etc.
- Emphasis on reaching the community
 - ✚ I'm going to interject something here that may not be too popular...I have heard a lot of church leaders say, "Well we may not be growing in number but the people we have are growing spiritually."
 - ✚ What they're saying is "We're growing deeper before we try to grow wider."
 - ✚ Although that may sound good (and it's not entirely an inaccurate attitude or statement) but most use it as an excuse. If the truth was known, they're not growing deeper at all. Most stagnate or declining churches are made up of stagnate members. (I told you this may not be popular!)
 - ✚ Don't let excuses or the hard truth keep you from facing this issue head on.
- Track statistics and compare to the past

- ✚ We've already dealt with this some with tracking numbers of visitors, but compare those numbers along with actual attendance numbers to years past.
- ✚ What direction is your church going?
- Building systems (other seminar- 8 essential systems)
 - ✚ Outreach
 - ✚ Assimilation
 - ✚ Teaching
 - ✚ Worship Planning
 - ✚ Stewardship
 - ✚ Leadership
 - ✚ Member Care
 - ✚ Continual Evaluation

Life-support Stage: Model 3

This stage requires a different starting place.

- Honest evaluation of viability and possibility of long-term success.
- Accept the truth- not every church can be revitalized.
- If it is decided that the work is not viable for long-term success and health due to a lack of population, locations, etc. then a decision must be made how to continue the legacy of the work
- If it is viable and has the demographic base to invest in the work then you'd include everything from stages 1 and 2 plus...
 - ✚ Realize you are starting over

- ✚ You must build a team outside of your congregation to restart your church
- ✚ This gets into a whole different realm that we cannot cover in this time
- ✚ If you evaluate your situation and decide this is where your church is, you need to consult with someone outside to help you. We would love to be that help but there are also other options you can explore.

Conclusion: Let me wrap this up...I'm sure your mind is reeling. You probably feel overwhelmed and maybe even a little discouraged. I hope you will feel encouraged after you've had time to process this a bit and think about the possibilities of the future. It is more likely than not that YOUR church has the possibility to turn around and see many people won to Christ. But you have to be willing to take a hard look and be honest with yourself and your people.

Last thing and I'm done. If you're here and you've thought, "Well, my church is doing fine. We're healthy and growing." That is great! I hope you will be an encouragement to others. Also, remember plateau and decline is only a few families away for any church. This is serious business and we must take it seriously with much prayer, fasting, constant evaluation and ongoing learning.

If I can ever be of any help to any of you, please don't hesitate to call on me or Free Will Baptist North American Ministries.