

# Turn-Around Churches

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### Introduction

Turnaround Pastors Are Rare –

The death of a church is usually avoidable, but it may take a different type of ministry mind-set than many of today's church leaders possess.

### Chapter 2

#### The Symptoms of Decline

##### The Nature of Decline

Eight Symptoms to Watch

Demographic Changes

Inadequate Leadership

Poor Management

Old Blood

Building Campaigns

The Ingrown Family

Resistance to Change

Spiritual Health

Some of the unique barriers to church health that our research uncovered were:

- Divisive internal politics;
- Inadequate Christian education and training
- Dilapidated facilities
- Frequent changes in leadership positions
- Pastor-centered ministry
- Emotional discouragement among the congregation
- Unreconciled theological disagreement
- Absence of ministry opportunities for people
- Financial decline
- Loss of key laypeople
- Loss of critical staff members
- Lowering of ministry standards
- Denominational meddling
- A shift from Bible-centered teaching
- Absence of an assimilation program

## Chapter 3 From Dream to Reality

### Elements of Revival

- Relational Integrity- It was not unusual to hear tales of nose-to-the-grindstone pastors who devoted themselves to preparing sermons, teaching Sunday School, performing the upkeep on the church grounds and parsonage and undertaking myriad other tasks that enabled them to be professional clergy but not one of the people.

My predecessor was a tremendous pulpiteer, but that's about where it stopped.

If we just go about our business, God will do His.

The turnaround pastor, therefore, had to create a bond of credibility and trust with the congregation.

- Pastoral Love of People – Another critical turnaround procedure was for the pastor not only to be viewed as trustworthy, but also to radically love his people.

### Strategic Initiatives

- Select a New Pastor- The first step may be the most important. To turn around a church, a new pastor must be brought in to lead the revolution.  
An entrenched pastor who has lived through the heart of the decline is unlikely to command the respect and to have the necessary energy not only to apply the brakes to the skid, but also to determine how to reverse the fortunes of the church.
- Release the Past- A turnaround pastor is one who focuses on the future of the community and the church.
- Define Outreach -In turnaround situations, we found that the new leadership instituted a simple plan for specific forms of outreach.
- Equip the Congregation – Turnaround pastors gave top priority to equipping the laity for effective, targeted ministry.  
The pastor focused the people on one or a few areas of ministry expertise based upon the pastor's personal outreach gifts.

- Select a Strong Leader – A successful turnaround pastor is a strong leader. A strong pastor is not afraid of stepping on a few toes or of making tough decisions.
- Pastor Must Work Hard-40 hours a week won't cut it.

Spiritual Practices – First, a turnaround church is resuscitated due to the wide-spread and heartfelt prayer. The pastor emerged as a true prayer giant. The congregation was led to a place where it, too, embraced prayer.

Often, a distinctive of the successful turnarounds was that people around the world were praying for the comeback of the church.

- Quality Sermons – Turnaround pastors indicated their sermons were a cut or two better than what the congregation had received in the past.
- Resource Base – The turnaround churches we studied had a war chest of resources that permitted the comeback.
- Seek Outside Perspective- Gaining an objective, outsider's perspective on churches and church dynamics was a resource common to all but the poorest of the churches we explored.
- Staff Support Essential – Another useful resource was having great staff members.
- A committed Core Group- The other irreplaceable resource was having a core of zealots.
- Long-term Pastoral Commitment
- The Role of Money – They said that when you have the vision and passion to minister, you can either raise the necessary money or compensate for its absence.
- Church Must Recognize Crisis- Several pastors alluded to the fact that, until the church recognized it was in a crisis situation, the necessary degree of change would have been impossible to introduce.
- Unity Essential to Recovery- Finally, a close relationship between the pastor and the laity must be established.

## Chapter 4

### Attributes of Turnaround Leaders

#### Basic Qualities of Leaders

- A Team Builder
  
- Provides Vision – When the pastor alone champions the vision, the church suffers; when the people own the vision, the church thrives. The pastor is the initial disseminator of the vision. When the church is truly healthy, the pastor becomes the protector of the integrity of the vision while the people become champions of the vision.
  
- Grows Spiritually – The focus in his life is upon becoming a “deeper” Christian.
  
- An Encourager – The congregation not only needs a leader who provides direction and builds skills, but also recognized what the people are doing and acknowledges and celebrates their growth.
  
- Strategic Thinker – While the pastor does the congregation a disservice by assuming the responsibility for the total development and tactical implementation of strategic plans, he provides an indispensable service by creating an environment and a track for exploiting the opportunities and strengths inherent in the church’s ministry.
  
- Takes Risks – A true leader does not wince at the necessity of change, at the possibility of failure or at the need to take risks.
  
- Workaholism – One of the unfortunate realities of the turnaround experience is that it may virtually require a pastor who accepts the turnaround challenge as the dominant purpose and focus of life.
  
- Spiritual Commitment – The turnaround pastors were unusually devoted to seek an intimate relationship with God on a regular basis.
  
- Strong Personality – Most turnaround pastors are self-assured and self-confident.
  
- A Potential Visionary – The turnaround pastor, though, is more likely to be the type of leader who has slowly refined his innate visionary skills and sees the dying church as the ideal place to put these faculties into practice.

## Chapter 5 Strategies for Growth

### The Process of Renewal

- Be sensitive to the past, but focus on the future.
- Spiritual depth has to be modeled for the people.
- Do just a few things, but do them with excellence.
- Return to the basics.
- Let the people enjoy some success - It doesn't take too many conversions to absolutely renovate a church.
- Get a running start and build the momentum. Seize the momentum immediately with powerful plans and an active response to the prevailing circumstances.
- The emphasis must be on people, not on programs.
- Help the people develop personal relationships with one another.
- Never let up.
- One program common to most churches was a small group or cell-based ministry
- The laity had to be carefully trained to participate in ministry.
- The worship services were imprinted with the style, attitude, and character of the new pastor.
- Creating a viable prayer ministry was common.
- An outward-looking perspective was planted in the minds and hearts of the people.
- Events were geared to building public awareness of the church.

## Chapter 6 Potholes on the Road to Recovery

**Resistance to Change** – One of the most prevalent obstacles to renewal is people's resistance to change.

To successfully guide a turnaround, a pastor must assume the role of change agent par excellence. The pastor who frets over some internal resistance and delays action until a consensus can be orchestrated is inviting major problems.

First, the delay suggests that vocalized concerns can stop the pastor in his tracks. Second, leadership by consensus is not leadership at all but merely a form of consensus management.

**Small-Church Mentality**- The turnaround cannot take root until the people are willing to accept the notion that a slice of the renewal effort that "small" may be beautiful, but "larger" may be just as beautiful, or even more so.

**Sense of Identity** – Turnaround pastors often struggle to understand the church because of the absence of agreement within the body about who they are and what they want to be. The turnaround leader must often define character as well as purpose so that the church can begin to love itself.

### **Teachable Congregation**

**Willingness to Submit** – A key precondition is to equip the people so that they are willing to submit to leadership. Until this happens, the church will remain a place of organizational disarray and spiritual suspicion.

**Adequate Budget Invaluable**- While money is not the single most important resource in a comeback, an adequate budget is invaluable. Turnaround pastors found that they were best advised to minimize a focus on facilities and to minimize the financial burden that a church might undertake to improve or to expand facilities.

The wisdom of the turnaround pastors was that the focus must not be on how the facilities limit the people but on how the people must empower each other.

**Strategic Plan a Must** – Because the church requires specific steps in dealing with the future, the plan must detail how that future is to be created. The plan must be aggressively championed by the pastor and key leaders, who then gain ownership of it from within the congregation.

**Restoring the Church's Image** – Few turnaround churches found that advertising and other marketing efforts were the key to their reversal of fortune. Restoring the self-esteem of the congregation and their confidence in the church's ministry were necessary precursors to building relationships with non-believers and unchurched people and inviting these people to visit the church. It is word-of-mouth, not radio broadcasts and newspaper advertisements, that brings newcomers in the door. The same relationships facilitated the integration of visitors into the life of the church. The pastor must encourage people to engage in such marketing and ministry activity and to celebrate such efforts.

**The Power of Prayer** – Until the church owns prayer as a world-class weapon in the battle against evil and cherishes prayer as a means of intimate and constant communication with God, the turnaround efforts of a body are severely limited, if not altogether doomed, to failure.

**An Outreach Orientation** – Similarly, a church will remain in its weakened condition until it becomes outreach-oriented.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Avoiding the Downward Spiral**

#### Twenty Suggestions

- Employ and protect a true leader as pastor. – The church must do all it can not only to follow the trail prepared by the leader, but also to protect the leader from burnout.
- The pastor must determine, own, articulate and unflinching pursue God's vision for the church's ministry.
- The pastor must model true Christianity.
- The pastor must create and champion a strategic plan for the church's growth.
- The people must feel loved and be loved by the pastor.
- The congregation must be open to change.
- The congregation must want to grow.
- Quality must be constantly enhanced.
- The ministry must provoke spiritual passion in its people.
- The congregation must seek new relationships.
- The church must anticipate the future rather than react to the present.
- The laity must be meaningfully motivated and equipped for ministry.
- When people perform true ministry, they should be applauded
- The emphasis must be on outreach
- Prayer must permeate the ministry.
- The church staff must be superb.
- The church learns from objective sources. - It is invaluable to seek and to consider the views of experts who can offer a unique perspective.
- The church must establish means of monitoring its ministry health on a consistent basis.
- The church must enter into a building campaign with extreme care.
- The church must maintain a standard of strong, practical Bible teaching.
- The Leader Must Be Unique – The chances of finding a turnaround pastor are slim.

## **Chapter 8**

### **The Last Hurrah**

Turnaround churches appear to be ministries that embrace a user friendly approach to ministry.

Much like a person recovering from an addiction, the recovery may never be complete, but always in process.

### The Irreplaceable Factor

As our studies consistently note, there is no substitute for strong leadership.

The good news is that a Christian church can recover its health and spiritual impact even after a “spectacular” debilitating collapse.

The bad news is that the odds of experiencing such a turnaround are slim.