

AN EVALUATION OF RESTART CHURCHES

A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of
Dallas Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Gary Lee Taylor
December, 2010

ABSTRACT

AN EVALUATION OF RESTART CHURCHES

GARY LEE TAYLOR

Readers: Dr. Scott Barfoot; Dr. Jay Desko

Some churches have chosen to “restart” as a way to become more viable. Often these are small churches in various stages of stagnation or decline. The purpose of this research project will be to focus on these restart churches in order to identify what changes or steps occur and in which order of their restart process. It will also attempt to determine whether these actions actually result in the subject churches becoming more viable with growth in attendance and income. Without this option, many plateaued or declining small churches may pass out of existence, leaving their surrounding community without their future witness.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	i
TABLE OF CONTENTS	ii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. PREVIOUS RESEARCH AND LITERATURE REVIEW	7
Survey of Literature	7
Definitions	9
Three Stages of Restarts (Preparation, Transition, and Launch)	11
3. PROCEDURE AND RESEARCH METHOD	15
4. RESULTS	18
5. CONCLUSIONS AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS	20
APPENDICES	22
BIBLIOGRAPHY	28

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

According to Ken Priddy, “Churches are dying at an alarming rate,”¹ and both Leith Anderson and Aubrey Malphurs claim that 80-85% of America’s churches are either stagnating or dying.^{2,3} Of all churches in the United States, the vast majority are under 100 in attendance.⁴ When these factors are combined, a church’s very existence can be threatened. It is often left with only three choices. The first of these choices is to close immediately and donate the asset to further the kingdom of God through some other organization. The second choice is to continue their ministries until all of their assets have been exhausted and they are forced to close.^{5,6} The final choice is to turnaround or revitalize their ministry. This is very unlikely in light of the fact they have probably been trying to do this for years.

¹ Kenneth Earl Priddy, “Restarting the Dying Church” (D.Min. diss., Reformed Theological Seminary, 2001), 58.

² Leith Anderson, *Dying for Change* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House Publishers, 1990), 10.

³ Aubrey Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century: A Comprehensive Guide for New Churches and Those Desiring Renewal*. 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker books, 2004), 255.

⁴ Lyle E. Schaller, *The Small Church Is Different!* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1982), 11. 25% of protestant churches have less than 35 in attendance; 50% average less than 75

⁵ Terry Bascom, “New Life for the Dying Church,” http://www.congregationalist.org/archivesold/May_01/Basscom.html (accessed August 5, 2009).

Enter a new option: restart! Restart is a cross between a turnaround church and a new church plant⁷, taking the best from both worlds while discarding unnecessary baggage. Use resources from the old to birth something new and move from death to restart!

A restart church might be compared to the ignition system on a car. I am part of a dying breed that still enjoys driving a standard transmission. While I love the control and fun of driving a stick shift, I especially like the option offered to restart the engine when the battery dies. Give it a shove, pop the clutch and I am on my way. No jumper cables. No other car. Just restart!

When it comes to churches, however, revitalization is a lengthy process which can take a long time depending on many other variables. Restarting concentrates all the energy and changes at a specific point in time to jolt the church into a restart. While finding a car with a good battery, locating the cables, allowing time for the dead battery to recharge sufficiently may eventually work, popping the clutch shakes the engine into action by concentrating a jolt all at once to jumpstart the engine. If the battery or alternator is bad, they will eventually have to be fixed, but there is enough movement forward to get home or to a service station. Similarly, it is my hypothesis that a restart will give the church enough of a jolt to get the church moving forward again at a sustainable level where work can begin on other defective parts, if needed, so it can gain momentum for the future.

⁶ Robert Humphrey, *Fresh Start – Strategic Church Consulting* (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart, 2002), 8.

⁷ Priddy, 72.

There are numerous other images which could be used to illustrate the restart option. When military war-gaming exercises go awry, they can “re-cock” the exercise – restart. If your computer begins running slow or a program becomes locked, you use the “restart” option to get a fresh and new beginning as the computer shuts down for a moment and restarts all the software. “Do-overs” are not always possible, but God is a God of second chances. He is a God who offers sin-sick and dying humankind the chance to be born again with a new beginning. Rebirth is also possible for small, struggling and dying churches who choose to restart.

In a telephone conversation in mid-2005, a leading church growth expert commented that “leadership is everything,”⁸ a phrase similar to that popularized by Christian leadership guru, John Maxwell, who says, “Everything rises and falls on leadership.”⁹ While I believe leadership skills and abilities are very important and studying the personality and leadership styles of “restart pastors” might be a profitable study for the future, there must also be other factors of importance in a restart. This premise that leadership is everything would suggest that process is meaningless. It does not explain why a “good leader” is unsuccessful at one church but dynamically successful at a different church. Other things enter into the equation such as context, expectations, the hidden will of God, *and* the process or methodology used to restart a dying church.

While leadership qualities, skills, personalities, and gifting matter, these topics will reach beyond the scope of my research. My study will concentrate on what changes

⁸ Dr. Aubrey Malphurs of Dallas, phone conversation with author, July 2005.

⁹ John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People Will Follow You*. (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 225.

typically accompany a restart such as whether restart churches can, or typically do, restart with or without changing pastors (rather than the *qualities* of that leader) as well as what other changes take place.

The church growth expert who told me “leadership is everything,” also serves as a church consultant whose firm deals with many “small churches down to around 300.”¹⁰ Truly small churches in the 100 attendance range or smaller often cannot afford church consultants, or are not inclined to bring in “outside professional help” until it is too late.¹¹ It is my desire that this study might provide hope and direction for those truly “small” churches that are struggling for their very existence and most often fall through the cracks between the typical paid church consultant and church growth book.

It is no secret that many proponents of active church planting favor it over helping the declining church because they believe it is easier to “have a baby than to raise the dead.”¹² While I am an avid proponent of church planting, I am not willing to give up on the importance of the small church in growing God’s Kingdom. Whether or not small churches are willing to try restarting or be effective at it may become more evident during this study, but this hybrid between revitalization and church planting could combine the best of both worlds into a kingdom building revolution.

¹⁰ Dr. Aubrey Malphurs of Dallas, phone conversation with author, July 2005.

¹¹ Humphrey, 12.

¹² Peter Wagner, *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest: A Comprehensive Guide* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990), 25, 64. His corollary is that “The single most effective evangelistic methodology under heaven is planting new churches.” (pages 11, 16, 24) (*ED. No dead person ever stayed dead in Jesus’ presence – it was easier for Him to raise the dead! Jesus didn’t have any babies, but he did heal the sick! These churches are already dying, so they have nothing to lose. I believe restart has potentially more impact than church planting in the long-term, so we should not put all our eggs in just the church planting basket.*)

I am currently the pastor of a small church which has gone through a recent decline over a four year period for various reasons, including my 13-month military deployment overseas. It had moved from an average attendance of 110 to around 75 and is on the rebound up to about 140 at present. I had considered whether a “restart” would be an appropriate way to stem the decline and breathe new life into this century-old church or if using some of the restart principles could be beneficial. A number of small churches in my church association¹³ have chosen this restart option and I know of many other small churches in my region which are on the verge of collapse or are simply surviving. This study will help me evaluate the benefits of using this option or some of its principles for my own church, and it is my hope it may provide some guidance for the many small churches which are barely surviving.

I sometimes see myself in my future years, after another possible overseas military deployment, as an associational leader or low-fee church consultant, assisting small churches through tough times and into growth. My hope would be to provide this on a gratis basis or for a much smaller fee than the typical church consultant. Knowing the process and results of church restarts will give me an additional option to place in my tool bag.

Not every small church can or should restart.^{14,15} Demographic considerations may dictate that a church will never grow much larger in certain sparsely populated rural areas. Another consideration is whether an area is oversaturated with other churches of a

¹³ Conservative Baptist

¹⁴ George Barna, *Turnaround Churches: How to Overcome Barriers to Growth and Bring New Life to an Established Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1993), 107-108.

similar theological perspective.¹⁶ Perhaps a church in this situation should close before all its assets are gone and dedicate their funds to a new church plant in a needy and growing area where their gospel witness can continue on in a different form. Possibly the church has enough energy to revitalize because it has not sunk low enough to be in danger of eventually closing. However, for many plateaued, stagnant or declining small churches, restart may be just the thing they need to “pop the clutch” and start moving forward again in the right direction.

Problem to be addressed: The purpose of this research is to identify what changes or steps occur in a church restart process and to determine whether these actions result in the subject churches becoming more viable.¹⁷

¹⁵ Humphrey, 62-63.

¹⁶ Stuart Murray, *Church Planting: Laying Foundations* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001), 88.

¹⁷ Concerning viability: Ed Stetzer in *Comeback Churches* says “we studied more than 300 churches that have experienced renewed growth after a significant period of plateau and/or decline.” (preface, p. 10) “Renewed growth” was his terminology. His second criteria was “experiencing significant (ed. *whatever that means*) growth through conversion as measured by increasing attendance and a decreasing membership to baptism ratio.” (preface, p 12) I choose to define “more viable” as “increased attendance and income.”

CHAPTER 2

PREVIOUS RESEARCH AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to identify and review research conducted and literature written on the subject of this dissertation.

Survey of Literature

While I have been unable to find any complete books written on the specific subject of “restart churches,” numerous books mention the concept. One recent book, *Falling in Love with the Church* by Larry McKain, includes a few pages of discussion on Restarts in a chapter entitled “Restart, Church Closure, and Corporate Sanctification”, but that is all of the published literature currently available on this subject. As for relevant dissertations, three written between 1993 and 2001¹⁸ discuss “restarts” as does one magazine article from 1981.¹⁹ That is it!

This is an important area of study that begs for more research and information,²⁰ as well as a published book dedicated to the subject. That this field is newly popular is evidenced by its appearance recently on multiple websites. I have chosen to launch a website dedicated solely to the subject of restart churches at

¹⁸ See Hasper, Tolleson, and Priddy in bibliography.

¹⁹ Donald Gerig, “Let’s Restart Old Churches.” *Christianity Today* 25 (March 27,, 1981): 40-41.

²⁰ Terry Tolleson, “Restart: An Alternative for Reclaiming Churches” (D.Min. diss., Gordon-Conwell Seminary, 1999), 10.

www.restartchurches.com, referencing all other internet material on the subject which I have found thus far. I have also discovered that several church planting and revitalization organizations are now beginning to include “restarts” in their seminars, sometimes even offering a separate track or session dealing with this topic.²¹⁻²² One of these seminars for which I was registered was canceled due to low enrollment, however, they have provided me with their handout for the one day event. As with hiring consultants, cost may be a factor for restart pastors taking advantage of such opportunities. I will attempt to discover what other resources are being offered and include them in my literature review.

I will begin my literature review with a biblical study of various “new beginnings” in the Scriptures which might compare to “restarts.” I will approach the topic first from a biblical theological perspective looking at various stories which speak of new beginnings. Secondly, I will employ a systematic approach to search for any biblical stories which relate to the various restart changes listed in my hypothesis statement in chapter three, hypothesis #2. Lessons learned from these passages will be used as a theological basis for restarting churches.

Two of the dissertations on restarts mention various biblical references. Ken Priddy touched on Amos, Joshua with Achan (Joshua 7), Solomon (2 Chronicles 7), Ezra and Nehemiah, as well as the seven churches of Revelation,²³ while Stephen Hasper referred to Adam and Eve, Noah, and Ezekiel’s dry bones, along with the churches in

²¹ Church Multiplication Training Center, “Restart Book Camp,” www.cmtcmultiply.org/bootcamp_restart.htm and www.cmtcmultiply.org/heard.htm#RESTART (accessed August 6, 2009).

²² New Church Specialties, “Restart Churches,” http://www.newchurchspecialties.org/ReStart_Churches (accessed August 6, 2009)

Revelation.²⁴ I have recently completed a sermon series entitled “New Beginnings” to which I have added Jacob, Moses & Joshua with the Israelites entering the Promised Land, Peter and Thomas after the resurrection, as well as New Beginning Prayers in the Bible. New Beginnings and Restarts abound in the Scriptures. It is my desire that these Scriptures and sermons may be used to help the small, declining church see their need for a restart.

Definitions

Since there is very little published on this subject, there is little consensus or attempt to define the terms being used -- rebirth, restart, replant -- which are often used interchangeably. These terms stand in contrast to “turnaround” or “revitalization,” usually used to refer to various attempts to help existing churches improve their duration and vitality without any interruption in ministry. For this reason, I will clarify the definitions I choose to adopt for the course of this project. Perhaps others will adopt these same definitions in future writings.

Revitalization. While many use the terms “revitalization” and “turnaround,” I have found few who actually define what these terms mean. Revitalization is the process of bringing new life and vitality to struggling and dying churches²⁵ through various methodologies over an extended period of time. “Turnaround churches are those that

²³ Priddy, 25-37.

²⁴ Stephen E. Hasper, “New Beginnings: Identification of, Analysis of, and Implications for Restart Churches of American Baptist.” (D.Min. diss., Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1993), 28-45.

²⁵ Ronald K. Crandall, *Turnaround and Beyond* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2008), 12.

once again experience renewal and marked growth in fruitful ministry after a lengthy period of decline and/or stagnation.”²⁶

Rebirth. Rebirth is used in this paper as *a broad term referring to both restarts and replants*. Since rebirth “revitalizes” churches, some might like to make this entire area a subset of turnaround, however, this author does not consider it so. This paper will only use revitalize and turnaround to refer to the broader revitalization principles which *gradually* turnaround a declining church over an extended period of time and will *not* use these terms to refer to rebirth situations.

Restart. Restart is defined as *a church which makes significant changes in personnel and organizational matters and may close publicly for a short period of time, while keeping some of the original church’s people and/or structure in place.*²⁷⁻²⁸ This research will hopefully ascertain the most common of these changes which increase the chance of a successful restart.

Replant. Unlike others who may use replant as a synonymous term for restart, replant is *a new church plant using only the former building of a closed church*. This means that no other part of the former church remains, including people, organizational structure or documents. There is a clean start and a totally new organization. Ministries, such as *American Mission For Opening Closed Churches*, specialize in these types of situations. This project will not invest much time with this subject, because it is simply a new church plant using a former church building for convenience, rather than finding an

²⁶ Daniel R. Young, “Turnaround Ministry.” (D.Min. diss., Biblical Theological Seminary, 2000), 4.

²⁷ Tolleson, abstract page, 2.

entirely new location and facility. Since the church is people and by this definition a replant's only connection with the previous church body is a building, a replant will not be considered an authentic "restart." The principles affecting a "replant" would be the same as in any other new church plant unless 1) there is "baggage" associated with the building which the new church plant must overcome or 2) the building is given free and clear, thus reducing the resources needed by the church plant. These latter considerations may be good reason to keep the word "replant" as a distinct category or subcategory of church planting as well as rebirth.

Summary. Restart churches are a cross between revitalization or turnaround churches and a new church plant.²⁹ For this reason, this paper will also consider some of the literature involved in these two related fields. The revitalization process keeps almost everything in tact and attempts to turnaround the church by incremental changes to help it grow with renewed vitality, while church planting births an entirely new entity from scratch. Restart is a blending of the two, keeping some of what has existed before and is still valuable for the restart (similar to revitalization), but focusing all of their efforts at a unified point of time to go public with a restart (as in a church plant's "birthing service").

The next section will deal with the actual process through which a stagnant and plateaued church approaching death moves through the process of restarting to become a growing and healthy church.

²⁸ Priddy, 8.

²⁹ Tolleson, 9.

Three Stages of Restarts

There are three major stages in a restart process: *Preparation, Transition, and Launch*.³⁰ These three phases run from a period of time before the church closes until a period of time following the restart when it will once again be considered a stable and growing church.

My main focus will be on the **Transition** or second of these stages: the mechanics of what changes take place in the process of a restart and their possible order. If the church closes for a period of time, many of these changes and the work needed to make them will take place while the church is closed to the public. It is these changes which my quantitative survey will investigate.

I will also review some of the literature which impacts the two other areas. In the first stage of **Preparation** (*convincing a church of its need to restart and closing out the old*), one of the most difficult tasks is to convince a church they need to act or they will die.³¹ Unless a person is convinced they are drowning, they often will not reach for the life preserver. The dying church must realize it is drowning. I will review literature which describes how difficult this first preparation stage is and how dying churches can meet this challenge. Most of these sources will be books dealing with the small or dying church.

For the third stage of **Launch** (*what the restart will look like after its reopening and how will it stay healthy during its first year*), I will explore some of the

³⁰ Priddy, 107ff. Ken Priddy notes five phases which I will incorporate as sub-phases to my three broader ones. In his dissertation, he even couples the middle three into one, effectively rendering three phases.

³¹ Priddy, 98, 105,

literature which will impact what the new restart will eventually look like and how it can continue to grow. Much of the church planting and healthy church literature will apply to this third stage. This will hopefully help to make restarts aware of valuable resources to guide in their restarts' longevity.

As mentioned, my research will primarily focus on the second stage called “transition,” evaluating whether the transitional changes during this stage help the restart to become more viable by increasing attendance and income, and to what extent these various changes may impact that outcome. We must recognize, however, that greater numbers do not necessarily translate into being a healthy or effective church. Small and stable is not necessarily bad and does not automatically mean “unhealthy,” especially in rural settings where the demographics will not support a larger church. Conversely, being large or growing does not equal “healthy.”³² I will introduce and compare a number of resources which can help the restart church become and remain healthy and effective as well as more viable.

As the pastor of a small church, I understand these three venues: restarts, revitalization, and church planting. I served my first church of between one hundred and one hundred twenty five for over five years in a rural Pennsylvania setting and have pastored my current church of between seventy and one hundred forty for twenty years in a small town suburb setting thirty five miles north of Philadelphia. I also served for nine years on our state association's church planting committee, the last six as chairman, and wrote the *Guidelines and Policy Manual* under which our association once again began to

³² Christian A. Swartz, *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), 20-21.

successfully plant churches after a number of failures. After my departure from that church planting committee, it has concentrated more on restarting small, declining churches partially due to financial constraints (planting churches can be very expensive).

My father served as pastor of a church in New Jersey for thirty-three years, so I experienced the small church and its growth from the inside out through college. Seminary took me to Oregon for five years, six months of which I spent in Manila, Philippines as a short term missionary working with a tiny church plant, while attending Asian Theological Seminary. It was there that I was exposed to extremely successful church planting efforts in the early 1980s.

Since most of my life has been in the northeast United States, I find it interesting that not a single one of Thom Rainer's *Breakout Churches* is located in the northeast, with his closest "breakout" churches located in Virginia and Ohio.³³ The area in which I now live is fertile ground for churches needing restart!

I have initiated contact with two individuals who work with this type of church, have leads on several others, and have found numerous references to individual churches on the internet which have been restarted. I expect to complete this project before another military deployment takes me abroad, however since much of the research is internet-based, I could continue this project even overseas. The cost of this project will be minimal, limited to the hosting and development of a website for the descriptive survey instrument.

³³ Thom S. Rainer, *Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zonderan, 2005), 219-239.

CHAPTER 3

PROCEDURE AND RESEARCH METHOD

Problem statement: The purpose of this research is to identify what changes or steps occur in a church restart process and to determine whether these actions result in the subject churches becoming more viable.

Research question: What changes or steps are included in a church restart process and do these actions result in the subject churches becoming more viable?

Hypotheses (these 4 are listed in chronological order of their likely occurrence):

- 1) The restart process is a potential approach to revitalize³⁴ a declining or plateaued small church. (results)
- 2) Three or more of the following major changes accompany a majority (51% or more) of successful restarts: (behavior)
 - A. New leadership – pastor and/or board
 - B. New name
 - C. New structure and/or constitution
 - D. New vision and/or strategy

³⁴ The author accepted the suggestion of the D.Min. committee in using the word *revitalize*, but would prefer to use a different word because he does not see restart as a subset of revitalization and this could be confused with other church revitalization techniques. The best substitution might be *resurrect*, however rejuvenate, regenerate, reinvigorate, rescue or restore would also be much better than revitalize.

- E. New or remodeled facilities/location
 - F. Close for a period of time.
 - G. Acquire a coach, mentor or outside advisory person or team.
- 3) Churches which go through a restart process exhibit an increase in attendance and giving. (results)
 - 4) Most church restarts will use a common order of steps in the restart process. (behavior)

Research method (program, survey, case study, etc.): A descriptive survey will be used to seek answers to the above research question; however, preliminary interviews will be conducted with subject matter experts (SME) to help develop the appropriate questions for the questionnaire instrument and the definition of the terms used (i.e. restart, replant, refocus, renewal, turnaround, viable, declining, plateaued, stagnant, etc.). I have chosen a quantitative internet research method in order to discover the current breadth of restart churches and obtain the widest possible sampling of data from around the world. From this data I hope to determine the various elements of the restart process and whether any chronological patterns exist within these elements.

While I believe there are many more restart churches than most would believe to exist at this point, the potential sample group is still relatively small. As a result, I will use a convenience sample of restart pastors including whomever I am able to contact by whatever means. My goal is to include as many restart pastors as possible from various locations and protestant faith groups by networking with currently known restart pastors, denominational leaders and church planting supervisors. Using an internet delivery

system will obtain results from a broader spectrum of churches than one might otherwise encounter, expanding beyond my own theological circles and geographical boundaries.

Since I will be using the internet as the primary delivery system for my survey, a limitation could be the availability of the internet to restart pastors. I am assuming, however, that due to the nature of restarts, most restart pastors will be younger or cutting edge enough to operate a computer and be connected to the internet. I plan to mitigate this limitation by making print copies of the survey available to those known restart pastors who do not have internet access. Another limitation for a restart pastor could be time availability to complete the survey. Every pastor is busy, and especially pastors in challenging circumstances such as that of a restart. I plan to request denominational leaders who supervise these types of churches to encourage their restart pastors to participate so that they, the denominational leaders and restart pastors, can benefit from the data collected after completion. I have also considered some sort of gift or reward for those who participate, but have not generated any idea within my financial resources at present.

Overall, while this survey will face some limitations, it is believed that these can be overcome by networking with those interested in this field. In the end, this convenience sample should produce a broad range of participants, greater than any questionnaire attempted prior to this time of restart pastors and churches.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

It is my “educated guess” that I expect to find that restart churches have a very good success rate when implementing certain steps as indicated in my hypothesis. I have not discussed this subject in detail yet with individuals working with these churches, in order to preserve my ability to collect untainted data from these same sources. Since there is also very little written on the subject, I am not able to predict at this time which of the possible changes might be most likely to occur. My hope is that I will discover that restarts can take place without a change in pastor, but I cannot say that I even have a best guess as to that answer yet.³⁵⁻³⁶

I also expect that some of these steps will parallel the process of planting a new church. Even so, I expect to use “restart” to refer to situations where some of the old is still present, while using “replant” for situations where the only thing remaining is a church building. This latter case I consider to be simply the planting of a new church using a closed former church building. I believe “restarts” will be most common in churches which have been around more than twenty-five years, and possibly up to a couple hundred years old. While I expect to find that older churches will most likely be the “small and plateaued, stagnant or declining churches” which will benefit most from a restart, they will also be the most likely to resist this type of radical change.

³⁵ Barna, 34, 47.

I further expect to find that most restart churches will be located in urban or suburban areas rather than rural areas. The reason for this expectation is that low population density will prevent truly rural churches from benefiting from a restart designed to increase attendance and viability. On the other hand, a higher population density will raise the chances for a successful restart which increases viability by increasing attendance and income. Consequently, I believe I will find the restart concept to be most beneficial for non-rural small churches.

I also may be able to determine which type, size, and age of church most often restarts ... at least among my sample churches. Depending on the geographical mix of those who participate, trends pinpointing which areas of the country or the world are most likely to generate restarts or where they appear to be most successful may surface. The quantitative survey will be made available to those without internet access in hardcopy form when those individuals are identified and the results posted on the www.restartchurches.org website.

In the end, I believe the data will demonstrate which changes are most common in church restarts and when or in which order they most commonly occur. This will hopefully benefit small, declining churches considering this option.

³⁶ Rainer, 16.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

I expect the results of my survey to give definitive and practical steps (chronology probably fluid) needed to restart a small and declining church such that it imbibes new life into that church. My research will give a fairly comprehensive list of changes made by restart churches as well as the frequency of that change across the sample churches. I also hope to compare the success of the restart with the steps which that particular church took, in order to indicate the levels of probability that each change has on effecting positive results on the restart.

Like a baker developing a new dish, I hope that my final recipe will be a list of ingredients for a restart church along with blending instructions which provide a chronological order for introducing each ingredient into the mix.

My desire is that many churches will follow this recipe as pilot projects to further determine the validity of this concept and provide additional data to improve this recipe. Other follow-up studies might also answer additional questions, such as: “Could churches NOT in danger of closing benefit from a restart?”; “Since churches begin to lose effectiveness after a certain number of years, should they restart to regain that ‘new church plant’ effectiveness?” and “How does pastoral leadership skills and style affect the success of a restart?”

Ultimately, however, my highest goal is that the Kingdom of God would benefit by the immense opportunity of restarting small and declining churches. Many experts would

rather plant new churches than try to revive old, dying churches with such rhetoric as “It is easier to have babies than raise the dead.”³⁷ The fact remains, however, that if only a small percentage of these churches could restart successfully, the sheer number of newly viable churches^{38,39} could have a greater impact than a robust church planting program and with less need for discovering new sources of revenue due to the assets available in the church prior to restart.

It is wise to remember that *every dying church was once a new church plant!* The restart principle will be needed to keep today’s church plants from becoming tomorrow’s dying churches. Statistically speaking, due to the high number of churches which fall into the small church category,⁴⁰ the potential impact of this study is much greater than ANY research dealing with the much fewer churches currently over 300 in attendance.

May Jesus Christ be praised and our local communities revolutionized by the restart impact of thousands of small churches in the days to come.

³⁷ Wagner, 25, 64.

³⁸ Priddy, 10.

³⁹ Humphrey, 4.

⁴⁰ Schaller, 11.

APPENDICES

“Restart Churches” – Preliminary Draft Internet Questionnaire

Thank you for participating in this research. The information that you provide is crucial to the ministry of all Restart Churches. A summary report of these results will be available on the website, as well as the dissertation it generates. Your responses will be kept in the strictest confidence unless you specifically allow otherwise. Thank you for your assistance!

Demographics and History

Date survey completed: ___/___/___ E-mail address: _____

Pastor’s name: _____ Phone #: _____

Pastor’s address: Street: _____
Town: _____ ST: _____ Zip: _____

Church name: _____ Denomination: _____

Church address: Street: _____
Town: _____ ST: _____ Zip: _____

Type of Church: Baptist Lutheran Methodist Presbyterian Reformed
 Charismatic/Pentecostal Non-Denominational Other: _____

Type of Church Government: Congregational Episcopal Presbyterian

Type of Community (around church): Urban Suburban Small town Rural

Size of Community: 100-10,000 10,000-50,000 50,000-100,000 over 100,000

Ethnic Mix of Community: ___% White ___% African-American
 ___% Asian
 ___% Latino ___% Other: _____

Year church began: _____ Year church “restart” began: _____

Which term would you use to describe your church before the restart?

Plateaued Declining Other: _____

	At highest point in past	1 year prior to Restart	<i>Restart</i>	1 year after Restart	Current statistics
Date:					
Average weekly Attendance:					
Average weekly Giving:					

What was the source of the above data? Written Memory Combination
 Other: _____

How confident are you that the above data is reliable & accurate? Very Confident Somewhat Confident Not Very Confident
How confident are you that the above data is reliable & accurate? 1 2 3 4 5

Restart Changes

When your church restarted, did the church:

- | | | |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Change the church name? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Close for a period of time? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Change pastors? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Add paid pastoral/ministerial staff? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| <u>Add paid support staff (janitorial, secretary, etc.)?</u> | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Change all the personnel on the church board? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Give control to an outside board or denomination? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Rewrite the current constitution? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Adopt an entirely new constitution? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| <u>Adopt a new vision statement?</u> | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Change children's programs? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Change music style? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Change approach to outreach/evangelism? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Change approach to newcomer assimilation? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| <u>Remodel the current facilities?</u> | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Expand the current facilities? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Buy or build a new facility? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Move to a new location? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Secure a mentor/coach to help the pastor? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| <u>Close the church for a period of time?</u> | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Add a website? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Revamp an existing website? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Secure outside financing? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Change advertising strategy? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |

How *important* do you feel the following changes were to *improving the success* of your restart church (circle the appropriate number)?

	very helpful	somewhat helpful	neutral not sure	not helpful	detrimental
Change the church name?	1	2	3	4	5
Close for a period of time?	1	2	3	4	5
Change pastors?	1	2	3	4	5
Add paid pastoral/ministerial staff?	1	2	3	4	5
Add paid support staff (janitorial, secretary, etc.)?	1	2	3	4	5
Change all the personnel on the church board?	1	2	3	4	5
Give control to an outside board or denomination?	1	2	3	4	5
Rewrite the current constitution?	1	2	3	4	5
Adopt an entirely new constitution?	1	2	3	4	5
Adopt a new vision statement?	1	2	3	4	5
Change children's programs?	1	2	3	4	5
Change music style?	1	2	3	4	5
Change approach to outreach/evangelism?	1	2	3	4	5
Change approach to newcomer assimilation?	1	2	3	4	5
Remodel the current facilities?	1	2	3	4	5
Expand the current facilities?	1	2	3	4	5

Cause internet questionnaire to only include those items with a "yes" answer in the previous section

Cause internet questionnaire to only include those items with a "yes" answer in the previous section

- Buy or build a new facility?
- Move to a new location?
- Secure a mentor/coach to help the pastor?
- Close the church for a period of time?
- Add a website?
- Revamp an existing website?
- Secure outside financing?
- Change advertising strategy?

very helpful	somewhat helpful	neutral not sure	not helpful	detrimental
1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5

Do you consider this restart a failure or success?

total failure	moderately disappointing	neutral not sure	moderately successful	extremely successful
1	2	3	4	5

Other changes you made not listed above: _____

What circumstances finally brought the church to a decision to attempt a restart? _____

What was your most important *negative* lesson during the restart process (what not to do)? _____

What was your most important *positive* lesson during the restart process (what to do)? _____

Specific Questions About Your Church Restart (answer all that apply)

If you changed the church's name, did you drop a faith group or denominational title from the name? Yes No Didn't change name

Former name: _____ New name: _____

If your church closed for a period of time, for how long did it close? _____ weeks _____ months

If you added new church staff, what positions and when did you add them?

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Worship | Part or Full-time? _____? | How long after restart? _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Children | Part or Full-time? _____? | How long after restart? _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Assimilation | Part or Full-time? _____? | How long after restart? _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | Part or Full-time? _____? | How long after restart? _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | Part or Full-time? _____? | How long after restart? _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | Part or Full-time? _____? | How long after restart? _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | Part or Full-time? _____? | How long after restart? _____ |

If you remodeled your facilities, which areas did you remodel?

- Bathrooms Nursery Kitchen Worship space Multi-purpose room
 Other: _____

If you expanded your facilities, what did you add?

- Worship Space Multi-purpose room Educational space
 Other: _____

If you bought or built new facilities, why did you do so?

- Old too dilapidated Cheaper than remodeling/expanding Better location
 Other: _____

If you changed children's programs, what changes did you make?

- Deleted a program: _____ Added a program: _____

If you changed the church's music style, did it become more contemporary?

- Yes No

What instruments did you use after the restart?

- Organ Piano Keyboard Drums
 Acoustic Guitar Electric Guitar Bass Guitar
 Other: _____

If you changed your approach to outreach/evangelism, what did you do differently? _____

If you changed your approach to newcomer assimilation, what did you do after restart? _____

If you secured outside financing to assist in the restart, from what source was it obtained?

- Denomination Private supporters Mission agency Other church(es)
- Pastor raised support Pastor became bi-vocational (worked another job)
- Other: _____

If you changed your advertising strategy, where did you advertise after the restart?

- Yellow pages Daily Newspaper Community newspaper (weekly/monthly)
- Website Billboard Directional signs Cable TV Station Network TV
- Paid Radio Public Service Announcement on Radio New sign on church property
- Other: _____

If you are not still at the restart church, how long after the restart began did you leave? _____

If you have left the restart church, why did you leave the church (check all that apply)?

- Church closed Church did not grow as expected Division in the church
- Church grew beyond my gifts Church Finances Personal Finances
- Discouragement Desired new challenge Called to another ministry
- Other: _____

If the work closed, what do you think contributed most to its ultimate closure?

- Location Facilities Finances Demographics Assimilation Leadership
- Constitutional Structure Church name Community involvement Evangelism
- Other: _____

Further comments about your restart you feel are important: _____

Would you be willing to be contacted by phone or e-mail for additional information if it would clarify or add value to this project? Yes No

OPTIONAL FINAL QUESTION – FOLLOW-UP WITH INTERVIEW ON SELECT FEW OF THOSE WHO COMPLETE THIS SECTION:

In which order did you make the following changes (number in chronological order and only include those you actually implemented; do not use the same number twice; if two took place together, give priority to the most important change)?

Cause internet questionnaire to only include those items with a "yes" answer in the previous question

- _____ Change the church name
- _____ Close for a period of time
- _____ Change pastors
- _____ Add paid pastoral/ministerial staff
- _____ Add paid support staff (janitorial, secretary, etc.)
- _____ Change all the personnel on the church board
- _____ Give control to an outside group or denomination
- _____ Rewrite the current constitution
- _____ Adopt an entirely new constitution
- _____ Adopt a new vision statement
- _____ Change children's programs?
- _____ Change music style
- _____ Change approach to outreach/evangelism?
- _____ Change approach to newcomer assimilation?
- _____ Remodel the current facilities
- _____ Expand the current facilities
- _____ Buy or build a new facility
- _____ Move to a new location
- _____ Secure a mentor/coach to help the pastor
- _____ Close the church for a period of time
- _____ Add a website
- _____ Revamp an existing website
- _____ Secure outside financing
- _____ Change advertising strategy

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anderson, Leith. *Dying for Change*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House Publishers, 1990.

Barna, George. *Turnaround Churches: How to Overcome Barriers to Growth and Bring New Life to an Established Church*. Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1993.

Bascom, Terry. "Restart: New Life for the Dying Church."
http://www.congregationalist.org/Archivesold/May_01/Basscom.html (accessed August 6, 2009).

Church Multiplication Training Center. "ReStart Ramp Up."
http://www.cmtcmultiply.org/bootcamp_restart.htm and
<http://www.cmtcmultiply.org/heard.htm#RESTART> (accessed August 6, 2009)

Crandall, Ronald K. *Turnaround and Beyond*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008.

Dudley, Carl S., and Carl S. Dudley. *Effective Small Churches in the Twenty-First Century*. Rev. and updated ed. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003.

Gerig, Donald. "Let's Restart Old Churches." *Christianity Today* 25 (March 27, 1981): 40-41.

Hasper, Stephen E. "New Beginnings: Identification of, Analysis of, and Implications for Restart Churches of American Baptist." Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1993.

Humphrey, Robert. *Fresh Start - Strategic Church Consulting*. St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart, 2002.

Malphurs, Aubrey. *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century: A Comprehensive Guide for New Churches and Those Desiring Renewal*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2004.

Maxwell, John C. *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People Will Follow You*. Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998.

Murray, Stuart. *Church Planting: Laying Foundations*. North American ed. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001.

New Church Specialties. "Restart Churches."

http://www.newchurchspecialties.org/ReStart_Churches (accessed August 6, 2009).

Priddy, Kenneth Earl. "Restarting the Dying Church." Dissertation, Reformed Theological Seminary, 2001.

Rainer, Thom S. *Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2005.

Schaller, Lyle E. *The Small Church Is Different!* Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1982.

Schwarz, Christian A. *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches*. Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1996.

Stetzer, Ed, and Mike Dodson. *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned around and Yours Can Too*. Nashville, TN.: B & H Pub. Group, 2007.

Tolleson, Terry. "Restart: An Alternative for Reclaiming Churches." Gordon-Conwell Seminary, 1999.

Wagner, C. Peter. *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest: A Comprehensive Guide*. Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1990.

Young, Daniel R. "Turnaround Ministry." Biblical Theological Seminary, 2000.

**DOCTOR OF MINISTRY
APPLIED RESEARCH PROJECT
TOPIC APPROVAL FORM**

Instructions: Fill out one copy of this form (single space type) and send it to the D.Min. Office. The D.Min. office will copy it and send it to the Department Chairman (PM, CE, or WM, whichever department your subject most normally falls under) for approval. Upon approval, the Department Chairman will send the form back to the Director of D.Min. Studies to be taken to the D.Min. Studies Committee for its approval. The D.Min. Committee will assign an adviser and a second reader and the D.Min. Administrative Assistant will inform the student.

Name of Student _____ Gary L. Taylor _____

Anticipated Graduation Date _____ December, 2010 _____

Applied Research Project Title _____ An Evaluation of Restart Churches _____

A summary description of your applied research project, including its rationale (why you want to do this project):

Some churches have chosen to “restart” as a way to become more viable. Usually these are small churches in various stages of plateau or decline. The purpose of this research project will focus on these restart churches to identify what changes or steps occur in which order in their restart process and to determine whether these actions actually result in the subject churches becoming more viable. Without this option, many plateaued or declining small churches may pass out of existence, leaving their surrounding community without their future witness.

Briefly state the significance of this topic for your personal ministry context (church, mission field, etc.) and its significance for others in similar ministries:

I am the pastor of a small church which has gone through a decline from 2002-2006 for various reasons, moving from an average attendance of 110 to 75. Although it is now on the rebound, I have considered whether some “restart” principles might be an appropriate way to stem future decline and breath new life into the church. I also know of other small churches in our church association which are on the verge of collapse. Such a study could prove beneficial to them and others like them.

Briefly state the relationship of the topic to your D.Min. goals and post-graduation goals:

I have sometimes seen myself in my later years as a church consultant or associational leader, assisting churches through tough times. Knowing the process and results of church restarts would give me an additional option to place in my tool bag. In addition, it will help me

evaluate in the short term the possibility of using this option with my own church, either leading up to my overseas deployment or preparing them for such an action upon my departure.

List at least 5 major books and 5 major journal articles and/or other sources with which you can start (use a separate sheet if necessary):

There are very few, if any, books and articles that deal with this specific topic. Websites are more available, but also very limited. I will have to rely on books on related subjects to a great extent such as turnaround churches and church planting. I have completed the church planting D.Min. course toward this end. My dissertation will be, to my knowledge, the only recent work on this subject, and one of the very few in existence.

Books:

Barna, George. *Turnaround Churches: How to Overcome Barriers to Growth and Bring New Life to an Established Church*. Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1993.

Collins, James C. *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap. And Others Don't*. 1st ed. New York: HarperBusiness, 2001.

Hasper, Stephen E. "New Beginnings: Identification of, Analysis of, and Implications for Restart Churches of American Baptist." Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1993.

Klassen, Ron, and John Koessler. *No Little Places: The Untapped Potential of the Small-Town-Church*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1996.

Rainer, Thom S. *Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2005.

Schwarz, Christian A. *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches*. Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1996.

Tolleson, Terry. "Restart: An Alternative for Reclaiming Churches." Gordon-Conwell Seminary, 1999.

Wood, Gene. *Leading Turnaround Churches*. St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2001.

Articles and/or websites:

Gerig, Donald. "Let's Restart Old Churches." *Christianity Today* (1981): 40-41.

<http://www.joyfulheart.com/plant/restart.htm> - *Restarting a Dead Church* by Dr. Ralph F. Wilson with info concerning Granada Hills Church in the San Fernando Valley of Los Angeles, CA

http://www.mcflorida.org/church_planting.htm - The Missionary Church Florida District (MCFD)

http://www.newchurchspecialties.org/cgi-bin/gx.cgi/AppLogic+FTContentServer/pagename=FaithHighway/10000/4000/328NE/restart_churches - New Church Specialties

Describe the compatibility of this topic with your capabilities, the availability of information, your limits of time, and limits of money (Is this project "doable?"):

This project is doable. I am the pastor of a small church and understand this venue. I served on our state's church planting committee for nine years and wrote the guidelines and policy manual under which our association once again began to successfully plant churches after a number of failures. I served the final 6 years of that tenure as chairman of that committee. I have initiated contact with a number of individuals who work with these type of restart churches, have leads on several others, and have found numerous references to individual restart churches on the internet. The actual cost will be minimal, limited to the production and distribution of a descriptive survey instrument. Since I am a military chaplain, if I were to be deployed before completion of the final product, I would continue to work on this project via e-mail and the internet from any overseas location.

Provide one sentence for each of the following items, as you currently understand them:

Problem to be addressed:

The purpose of this research is to identify what changes or steps occur in a church restart process and to determine whether these actions result in the subject churches becoming (more?) viable.

Research question:

What changes or steps are included in a church restart process and do these actions result in the subject churches becoming (more?) viable?

Research method (program, survey, case study, etc.):

A descriptive survey will be used to seek the answer to the above research question; however, preliminary interviews will be conducted with subject matter experts (SME) to help develop the appropriate questions for the questionnaire instrument and the definition of the terms used (i.e. restart, replant, refocus, renewal, turnaround, etc.).

Hypotheses (these 4 are listed in chronological order of their likely occurrence):

- 1) The restart process is a potential approach to revitalize a declining or plateaued small church.
(results)
- 2) Three or more of the following major changes accompany a majority (51% or more) of successful restarts: *(behavior)*
 - A. New leadership – pastor and/or board
 - B. New name
 - C. New structure and/or constitution
 - D. New vision and/or strategy
 - E. New or remodeled facilities/location
 - F. Close for a period of time.
 - G. Acquire a coach, mentor or outside advisory person or team
- 3) Churches that go through a restart process exhibit an increase in attendance and giving.
(results)
- 4) Most church restarts will use a common order of steps in the restart process.

STUDENTS SHOULD NOT WRITE BELOW THIS LINE

For Committee Use

Subject Approved:

(Department Chairman)

(Date)

(D.Min. Committee)

(Date)

**D.Min. Committee
Appointments:**

(adviser)

(second reader)