

DISSERTATION AND THESES NOTICES

Compiled by Gary L. McIntosh, D.Min., Ph.D.

Issues of the *Great Commission Research Journal* have featured recent dissertations and theses of interest to our readers. Particular attention is given to publications that present research on evangelism, church growth, church planting & multiplication, missional church, emerging/emergent church, communication theory, leadership theory and other topics related to effective fulfillment of the Great Commission. Directors of doctoral programs, as well as graduating students, are encouraged to send notice of recent dissertations to Gary L. McIntosh, Dissertation Editor, at gary.mcintosh@biola.edu. Due to space limitations, and the large number of dissertations published each year, only a few dissertations are featured.

In particular this issue of the *Great Commission Research Journal* features recent dissertations that focus on some aspect related to church revitalization.

“Church revitalization: A case study of Bayview Church of Guam”

Author: Elwell, Kevin W., D.Min., Talbot School of Theology, 2016. 136 pages.

Abstract

The purpose of this case study was to discover the answer to the question: Is there a workable strategy for revitalization for Bayview Church of Guam? For nearly a decade Bayview has experienced a plateau or decline. This case study examined factors such as the history of the church and the island culture of Guam that affect growth.

A study of Scripture was also undertaken to identify biblical principles regarding revitalization that could be applied to a turn-around strategy. Literature covering three main schools of thought for church revitalization—the Church Growth Movement, church health, and missional church—was also incorporated into the study.

A plan for reinvigorating vitality was presented including necessary steps and goals for a period of five years. Each year of this plan prioritized what is important for each consecutive year so that in the following years of the plan growth can be built upon better support for greater growth.

“Equipping a select group of leaders of Holly Grove Baptist Church, Spring Hope, North Carolina, to pray in preparation for church revitalization.”

Author: Lee, Sean Allen, D.Min., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016. 111 pages.

Abstract

Christians face a primarily spiritual battle, not a physical one. The preparation needed for spiritual warfare has escaped a vast number of leaders, and Satan seeks to disarm followers of Christ who seek to make an impact on eternity. In short, too few church leaders pray well, and too few congregations pray well. The local church needs proactive prayer to help in attacking the enemy, Satan, especially in church revitalization.

A plethora of literature exists pertaining to the individual’s petitioning God, but rare are the books that promote prayer as the driving emphasis for the support of church revitalization. The project director values the importance of prayer and conceptual framework of team ministry, and he sought to equip leaders of his church to pray in preparation for church revitalization. Holly Grove Baptist Church has a desire to rise above the mediocrity present in a myriad of churches, and prayer would be the first step in that direction.

The project director prayed for God to direct him toward six Spirit-led congregants to form the group he would train in prayer. The group of seven individuals (project director included) represented approximately 10 percent of the church. The prayer group met over an eight-week period to study prayer, to consider the health of the church, and to petition God to use them as a catalyst for church revitalization.

“Assessing congregational culture for effective leadership.”

Author: Mattingly, Chad, D.Min., Asbury Theological Seminary, 2016. 142 pages.

Abstract

A great puzzle faces many churches of various denominations around the world. Once strong and influential congregations are now stagnant and declining, and many pastors seem unequipped to lead their people into a new season of ministry and mission. The downward trends paint a bleak picture and many pastors are starting to ask these important questions. First, is there hope for revitalization in these established congregations? The Scriptures offer an emphatic “Yes!” Hope exists because the Christian God is one with a reputation for resurrecting things, tirelessly working to bring new life and wholeness to all Creation. Second, what are the causes of the sustained decline of so many local churches and how can pastors lead in this monumental revitalization task ahead? This project asserts that successful revitalization efforts require understanding church culture and practicing contextual leadership. It is imperative to know that effective leadership varies from congregation to congregation because each church possesses a distinct culture and functions uniquely. This distinctive culture is made up of unique beliefs, behaviors, attitudes and postures stemming from the collective experience of the church. In *Culture Shift, Transforming Your Church from Inside Out*, Robert Lewis, Wayne Cordeiro and Warren Bird suggest that “culture is the most important reality in your church” (3). The pastor seeking to lead effectively in the local church must be aware of these unique dynamics and modify leadership philosophies and practices accordingly.

The purpose of this study was to identify and utilize a church culture assessment tool to help the Kingwood Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) pastoral staff and lay leadership understand the unique culture of the congregation in order that they might modify leadership philosophies and practices to promote congregational revitalization. Upon completion, the assessment process revealed that cultural education and evaluation in Kingwood Christian Church provided a revelatory, hopeful and reliable

groundwork for congregational understanding. The assessment provided a foundation for truly contextual leadership strategies and practices, thus enabling Spirit-empowered efforts for resurrection and revitalization.

“Developing a training module for church revitalization utilizing church planting methodologies with a select group of members of Fontaine Baptist Church in Martinsville, Virginia.”

Author: Shanks, Andrew P., Ph.D., The Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016. 156 pages.

Abstract

Fontaine Baptist Church rests near the southern border of one of the southernmost counties in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Henry County, with the city of Martinsville at its heart, once boasted a booming economy, due to the bustling textile and furniture factories operating there. Fontaine thrived along with the local economy. Founded in 1919, Fontaine reached her zenith in the three decades between 1960 and 1990, a fitting microcosm of the local community. As the fortunes of the surrounding community declined, however, so did the vibrancy of the church. Fontaine slid slowly from an active membership of over 300 in 1985 to only 65 at the present time.

While the decline of the local economy and the depression of the surrounding community serve as a convenient excuse for Fontaine’s decline, other factors play a part as well. Most notably, members of Fontaine failed to see themselves as a missionaries within their community, failed to share the gospel with their community, and as a result, failed to witness any significant growth.

The project director designed the project to catalyze revitalization at Fontaine by re-orienting the church around a missionary mindset. To accomplish this, the project director attempted to cultivate a church plant mindset among a select group of members of Fontaine through the implementation of a six-week training module. The project director designed the training module to imitate the kind of training church planters employ with their launch teams. By utilizing church plant methodologies, the project director hoped to cultivate the vibrancy and passion that often characterize new church plants.

As a result of the ministry project, the project director grew in his understanding of church revitalizations in general, and of the specific challenges facing churches in Martinsville and Henry County in particular. The training module itself yielded mixed results from its participants. The project director hopes that with some adjustments, the training module will prove useful for implementation with future groups.

“Revitalizing Wesley United Methodist Church by reclaiming a biblical understanding of the role of pastor.”

Author: Vanden Langenberg, Tim J., D.Min., Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 2016. 238 pages.

Abstract

This project sought to address the need for revitalization and restoration of church health at Wesley United Methodist Church in Wausau, Wisconsin, following a decade of high turnover of pastors. The results of this high turnover included conflict within the congregation, mistrust of denominational leaders, and mixed and often contradictory expectations of the pastors.

To address these issues and to seek a remedy, the project examined the role of the shepherd-pastor through biblical and theological literature and in a general review of contemporary literature on the subject. Next, the project presented a six-session class for the church members to share information about how a biblical understanding of the role of pastors is critical to church health. A six-part sermon series, utilizing the class material, was also part of the project. Interviews with key congregational and denominational leaders contributed rich insight into the issues involved and the need for the revitalization which the project hopes to achieve.

Few church members and leaders chose to participate in the class. Lack of participation did not render the effects of the project as null, however, but revealed the depth of the issues ingrained at Wesley United Methodist Church, which the scope of the project was unable to fully address.

Revitalization through this project as applied in future ministry contexts can offer hope of church health and even growth, using God’s plan of leadership.

“The anthropological pastor: Navigating the culture of an established church by implementing anthropological tools and resources.”

Author: Turpin, Christopher Eric, D.Min., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016. 311 pages.

Abstract

This dissertation explores anthropological tools and resources and their potential usefulness in navigating the culture of an established church. The application of the principles contained herein can be used for church revitalization, pastor transitions, and established church leadership. These principles can also be applied to business and organizational cultures. Chapter

1 presents the research question that serves as the investigative guide for the dissertation. This dissertation argues that the pastor(s)/elders, and/or potential pastor(s)/elders, of established local churches, should know and implement many of the tools and resources of cultural anthropology within their ministry context in order to enhance understanding and communication between the pastor and his congregation, resulting in healthier pastor-congregation relations, healthier churches, and greater Kingdom effectiveness. Further, this chapter proposes an amalgamation of the research from the fields of anthropology/missiology, relevant organizational culture literature, and church leadership materials. Chapter 2 serves as a survey of much of the relevant literature surrounding the study of anthropology/missiology, church leadership, and relevant organizational culture literature. This literature review traces an overview of the development of anthropological thought and the value of anthropological tools and resources. The review then demonstrates how anthropology is being discussed in church leadership materials, but without significant interaction with anthropological resources. Due to the scope of this research, the author narrows his interaction with church leadership material to materials that include sections that seem to recognize that each established churches exhibit culture. Chapter 3 presents the author's findings from anthropological research most relevant to the work of a local church pastor. Paul Hiebert's book *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* serves as a blueprint for the outline of the chapter. The chapter continues to look at available anthropological tools and resources, the ways they are understood and implemented by others, and potential applications toward established churches. Chapter 4 examines church leadership literature resources that consider established churches to exhibit culture. Aubrey Malphurs' book, *Look Before You Lead*, serves as a blueprint for the outline of the chapter. The primary objective of this chapter is to demonstrate the fact that church leadership authors interact very little with the writings, research, paradigms, and tools of anthropologists or missiologists. Chapter 5 presents the author's findings and conclusions. The focus is on developing the field of congregational cultural anthropology for the purpose of equipping pastors to understand and work through established church cultures. The author introduces a rapid assessment process (RAP) for understanding and navigating congregational culture. He concludes with an adaptation of Paul Hiebert's method for engaging in critical contextualization, but for the purpose of transforming congregational culture. He also proposes the development of a field handbook for rapid assessment processes among established churches and an expansion of the field of congregational cultural anthropology.