

# “Renewal, Revitalization or Resuscitation?”

LPD Conference Workshop

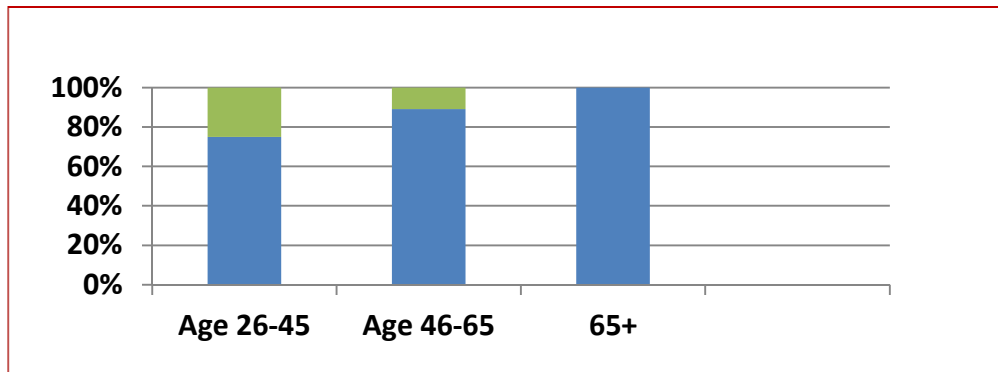
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In our Lower Pacific District, we have churches ranging from in age from newborn to almost 80 years. Local churches, like all organisms and organizations have a lifecycle. In nature, the lifecycle leads from birth through death, hopefully with reproduction somewhere along the way. Fortunately, for local churches, “death” is almost always avoidable. Sometimes, however, death comes through neglect and diversion from both the source and purpose of new life, Jesus Christ.

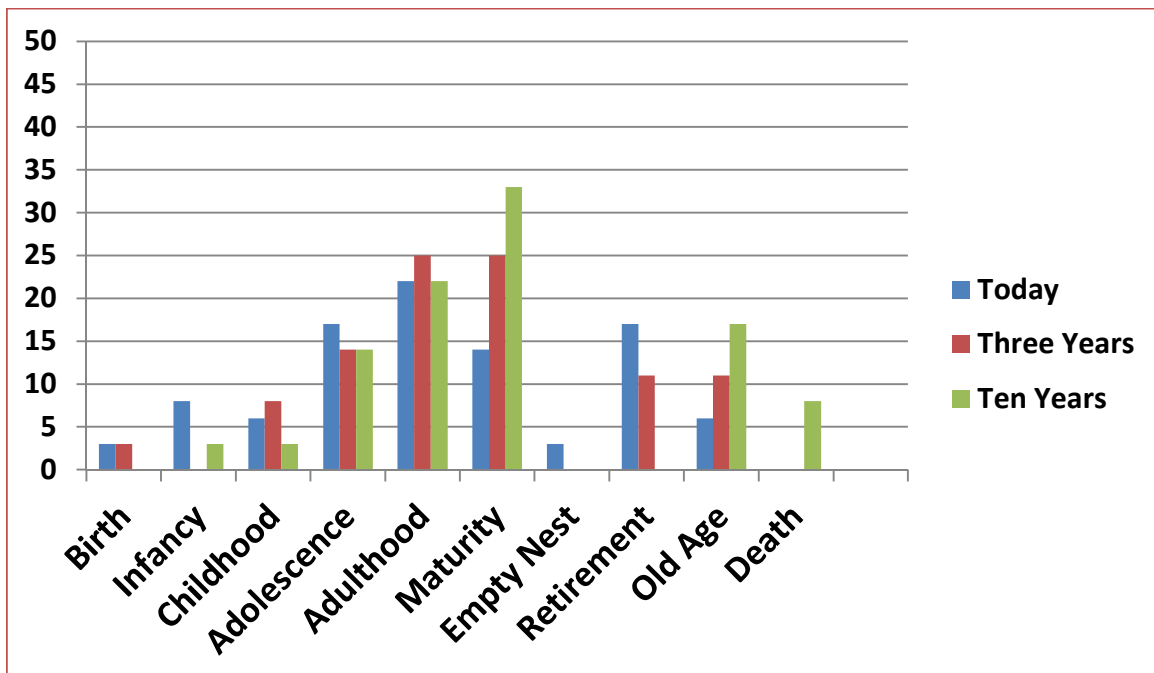
In preparation for our district conference, many of you read my article on life cycles and the local church and also participated in a survey regarding the “ministry context” of your local church in relation to its life cycle. Thirty-six surveys were returned. 75% of respondents are pastors or church staff, 22% are church board members or volunteer leaders and 3% are lay attendees. Here are some findings:

86% of respondents are either very hopeful (53%) or generally hopeful (33%) for the future of their local church. While hopeful, this is not a blind hope. Interestingly, it appears that the older one gets, the more hopeful one becomes. 75% of respondents of ages 26-45 report being hopeful. 89% of respondents of ages 45-65 report being hopeful, and 100% of those 65+ report being hopeful.



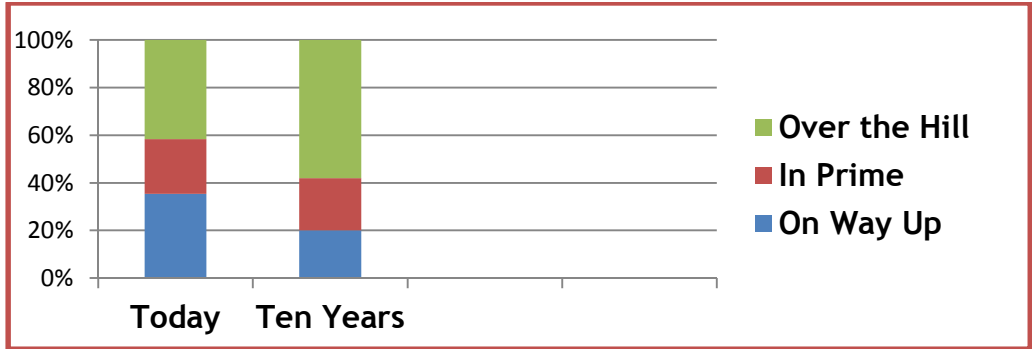
Hopefulness for one's local church

Participants were asked to use the life cycle continuum as a means of perceiving the current health and vitality of their church, and that for the future, based on its current trajectory. The following is a graph of how respondents currently view their local church on the church life cycle scale, and project to three and ten years in the future,



Respondents' life cycle projections for their churches – today, three years and ten years in the future.

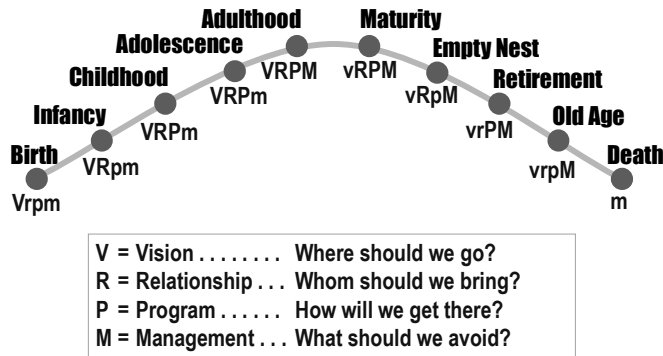
Summarizing this, respondents collectively anticipate that over the next ten years, we will have more churches on the declining side of the continuum than either the upward side or peak. Currently, 34% of respondents consider their churches as being on the upward side of the continuum, 22% of respondents consider their church to be at adulthood/prime, and 40% of respondents see their church as being on the declining side. The same respondents project that in ten years' time, 20% of churches will be on the upward side, 22% will be at adulthood/prime and 58% will be on the declining side.



If the above realities and trajectories are true, then what are we called to do about this? *This is a reason for this workshop and prayerful discussion, “Renewal, Revitalization or Resuscitation?”*

**Leadership through the lifecycles of the local church**

**LIFECYCLE OF A CHURCH**



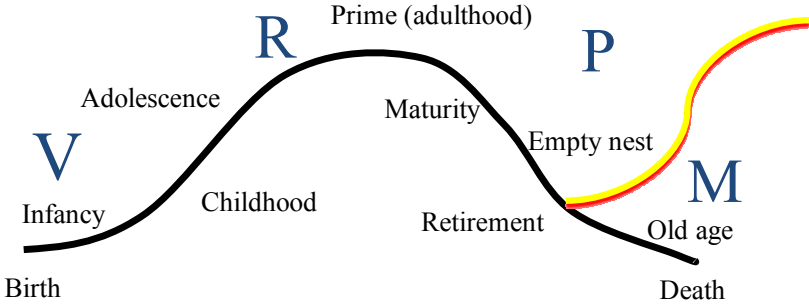
- The question for every leader and pastor is, “**How do we move our congregation from where we are to where God is calling us to be?”**”
- **Within this question are three tasks:**
  1. assessing where we currently are
  2. discerning where God would have us be
  3. determining the path to that destination

**Stages of the Lifecycle of the local church:**

- **Birth (Vrpm)** - Birth is that stage when Vision is dominant, but relationships, programs, and management are not.
- **Infancy (VRpm)** - Infancy is when Vision is dominant, and has been joined by inclusionary relationships, but programs and management are not dominant.
- **Childhood (VRPm)** - In Childhood, Vision is dominant, but instead of inclusionary relationships, now Programs are dominant. Management remains underdeveloped.
- **Adolescence (VRPm)** - During Adolescence, Vision, Inclusionary relationships and Programs are all three dominant. Only management is not fully developed.

- **Adulthood (VRPM)** - The church is at full Kingdom potential. All four (VRPM) are dominant and appropriately aligned.
- **Maturity (vRPM)** - In Maturity, for the first time, Vision is diminished. Relationships, Programs, and Management remain fully developed.
- **Empty Nest (vRpM)** - Programs become diminished, joining vision, when a congregation enters Empty Nest. Relationships and Management remain as the dominant factors.
- **Retirement (vrPM)** - Retirement is organized around the lead roles of Programs and Management. Vision and Relationships are passive, even wounded.
- **Old Age (vrpM)** - Only Management remains dominant in the Old Age stage. Vision, relationships, and programs are all passive.
- **Death (m)** - At Death, only essential structural management is even present. Vision, Relationships, and Programs are disappeared.

### Changing the Life Cycle of the Local Church



Typically, it has been seen that a church on the declining side of the life cycle should plan to revision, and thus start a new lifecycle. It has been suggested that this cycle may need to be repeated as often as every eight to ten years.

While such revitalization or even resuscitation might be needed for a church that is nearing death, it has been found that small “victories” can be used to build a church through a process of reversing the aging process. Thus a church might move from “Old Age” to “Retirement,” on towards “Empty Nest,” and so on.

Some participants in the survey wrote of this:

*The shift from retirement to adulthood within the six years that we have been at this church reflect a change of pastoral leadership style and gifting and focus, as well as a changeover over of some lay leadership, and facing some ministry realities such as changing family needs, missed opportunities, deliberate effort to rise above issues and hurdles with God's help and to carve out a new path. A great deal of the present enthusiasm relates to the lead pastor who has been here for two years. Within such a short time his humility, transparency, authenticity, and love has infected the entire congregation and all want to be part of the new thing that we believe God is doing. We are in an adulthood stage, ready to have more children, raise a family, watch it grow and become mature as well.*

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*I feel we are on another lifecycle from when we first came. The church didn't altogether die, but it went through a downward decline with a loss of a lot of members, and a time of discouragement.*

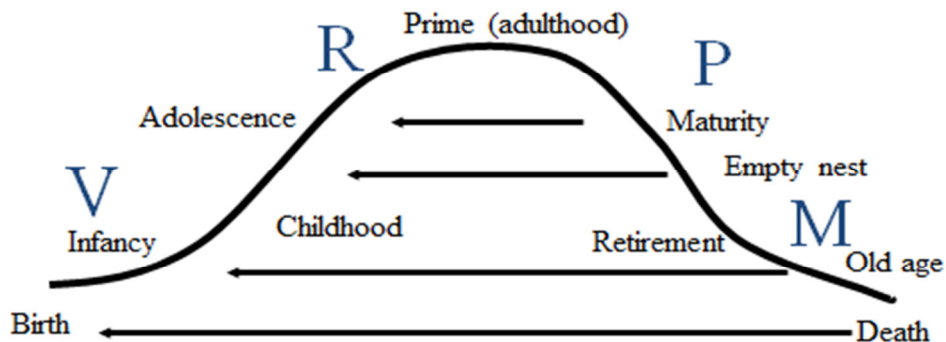
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*If we can develop a good vision that unites us, and is implemented in programs, then we should be at "adolescence" in 3 years, but still needing to smooth out the "management." If there is resistance to vision and lack of unity, the church will be at Old Age until the "managers" burn out, resulting in the church's death.*

### Here is a template for incrementally “reversing the lifecycle of a church:

Before proceeding, it is imperative to note that foundational to all the process of assessing where the church is currently at, discerning where God is leading and determining the path to the church's future will be undergirded with prayer. What follows is not a formula for success, but is rather counsel for an approach to the revitalization of your church.

## Revitalizing a Church: Targets



### Leadership on the “right” side of the life cycle:

- Principle 1: Deal with what you lost most recently (V,R,P,M)
- Principle 2: Determine whether change strategies can be continuous, discontinuous or even radical
- Principle 3: The further down the curve, the longer it will take and less likely it will work

#### 1. Leadership at “Maturity” – *revision*

- Deal with what you lost latest: “Vision”
- Move from vRPM to VRPM
- Sometimes a simple transition of pastors works here (though not at other places!)
- Takes 6-18 months to redevelop at this stage
- Continuous (not radical) change works best

#### 2. Leadership at “Empty Nest” - *renewal*

- Deal with what you lost latest: “Program”
- Move from vRpM to vRPM
- **Four stages:**
  1. Nostalgia
  2. Disappointment
  3. “Try harder”
  4. Anger

- If caught at “nostalgia,” the church can do incremental change
- If at “disappointment, anger, or beyond,” one must lead via introducing discontinuous or radical change
- Takes 18-36 months

### 3. Leadership at “Retirement” - *revitalization/revision*

- Deal with Relationships first, then Vision
- From vrPM to vRPM
- Must create lots of new ways for new people (not malcontents) to be reached and included in the life of the church
- Takes 3-5 years

### 4. Leadership task at “Old Age” - *resuscitation*

- From vrpM to Vrpm
- Resuscitation/ reinventing, not revising
- This is no place to use continuous change strategies. *“Let’s begin with a blank sheet and start from ground up”*
- Very difficult to initiate without 3rd party - a consultant or intentional transition ministry
- Takes 18-36 months (a shorter time frame but violently different)

### 5. Leadership Task at “Death” - *resuscitation - (or resurrection)*

- From “m” to Vrpm
- First V, then R
- 18-36 month time frame
- Relocations, annexations, bequeathings

#### Discussion Questions:

1. Describe where you believe the church was on the life cycle when you came to the church, and what evidences were there of this?
2. Was there a need to identify and address life cycle issues in your church? If so, please describe how you have sought to revitalize your church.
3. What has been your greatest victory in this process?  
What has been your greatest challenge?
4. What lessons have you learned in this process?
5. When you think of Millennials/younger voices that you are hearing, what do you consider to be their greatest disappointment with the organized church? What would you consider to be their most important message to the church?