

# AUC Ministerial Association

## Group Discussion Guide

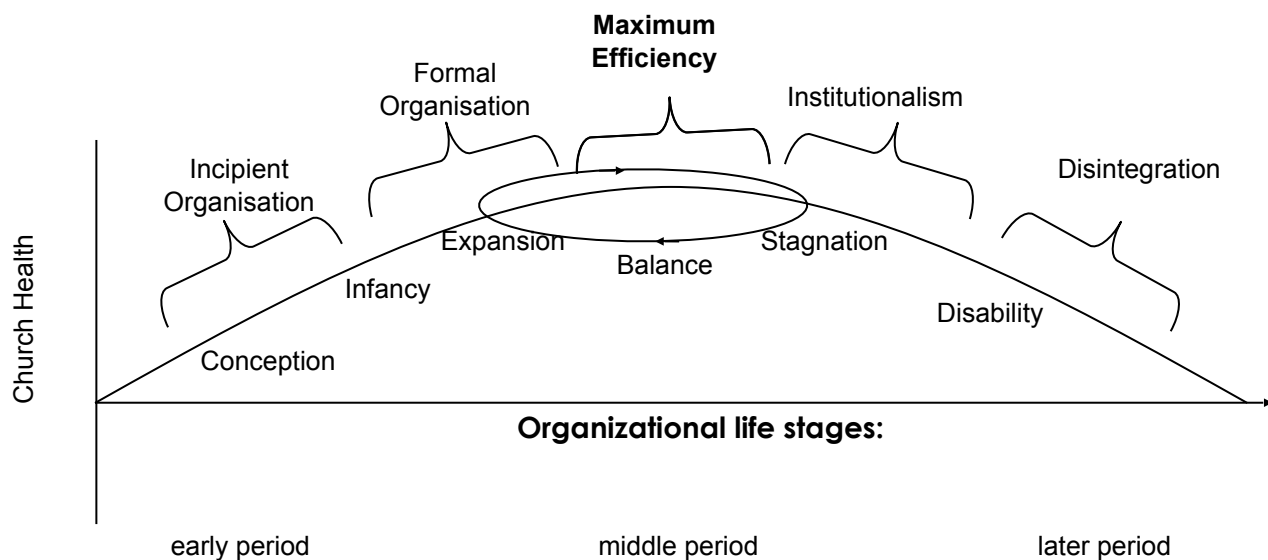


# Life Cycles

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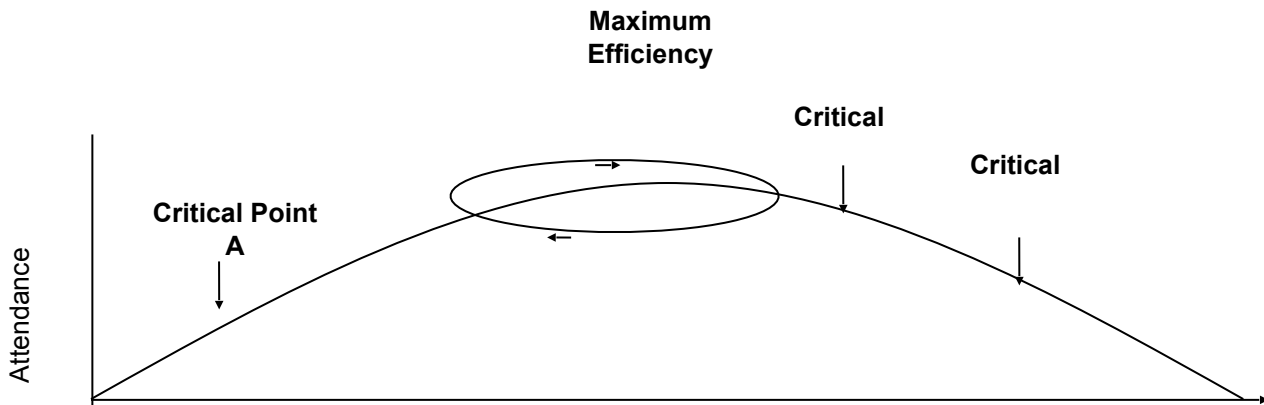
# Thinking About Church Life Cycles

- All living organisms have a Life Cycle.
- Church is a living organism - not merely an Institution.
- Unlike the human body church life cycles can be renewed.
- The further down the right hand side a church moves the harder it is to renew, however, it is still possible.
- Healthy church planting can help a church renew its life cycle.
- Churches can live at the maximum efficiency point.
- Left to their own drift, churches move through the life cycle in remarkably predictable ways.



- 1- Conception
- 2- Infancy
- 3- Expansion
- 4- Balance
- 5- Stagnation
- 6- Disability

# Critical Points

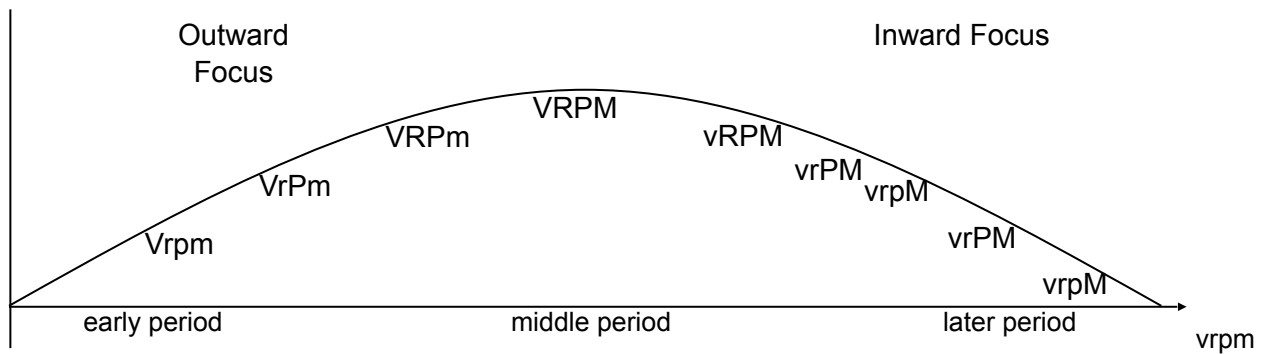


Point A – many churches never develop the programme/systems that achieve the vision of the church.

Point B – most churches do not have systems in place that help them identify when they have started moving down the right hand side.

Point C – The church realises that it is in decline but takes the wrong action to address what is happening.

# Vision, Relationships, Programmes, Management



- V = Vision**
- R = Relationships**
- P = Programmes**
- M = Management**

## Vrpm

A healthy church plant starts with a high level of vision. There are not many relationships as the church has not impacted many people at this point. There are not many programmes and management is very fluid.

**VrPm**

Programmes are shaped to achieve the vision.

**VRPm**

If the Programmes work and achieve the vision people join the groups and relationships increase.

**VRPM**

Systems (management) are put in place to make sure everything works well and is supported and that resources are being stewarded well.

**vRPM**

Vision is swapped by church life. People think programmes are the vision. New people joining do see the programmes but do not have an opportunity to hear the vision. A new generation grows up without the vision being explained to them.

**vrPM**

The programme is now more important than people. At this point attendance starts to decline as relationships (especially with new people) become less significant.

**vrpM**

People no longer want to serve in the programmes and consequently ministries are disbanded.

**vrPM**

The congregation meets to 'revive' the church. Instead of re-envisioning they choose to do the programmes they used to. People rally around to 'save the church'.

**vrpM**

The programmes die and the church keeps managing in decline until even management dies.

**vrpm**

The 'church' (in name only as it is not achieving the biblical purposes of the church) keeps going with just enough income to get by until often the congregation literally dies.

## **Vision is the key to church revitalization.**

Not just any vision but God's vision of what He wants the church to 'be' and 'do'. God Honouring, Outward Focused Vision is crucial in turning churches around and starting a new life-cycle.

### **The vision will focus on:**

- **Growing in relationship with God**
- **Connecting with one another**
- **Serving in the church and community**
- **Worshipping**
- **Sharing faith.**

How each church goes about implementing the vision in terms of these five purposes will be different for every congregation. Shaping this plan takes lots of prayer, diligence and exploring together.

## **Avoiding Stagnation and Disability**

1. Make sure a discipleship process is in place that grows people in personal spiritual disciplines.
2. Actively cast an outward focused vision.
3. Increase the pace of leadership development while in stage 3.
4. Ensure that leaders have access to ample and reliable information about the state of the ministry.
5. Leaders must help the ministry refocus and renew before hitting stagnation.

## **Revitalizing On The Down Side**

1. **Prayer** is the most important factor in turning churches around. Create an environment of prayer seeking **God's leading** for the mission of the church and for one another. (Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, B&H Books, 2007. identified prayer as the number one turn-around factor – see appendix one summary.)
2. Focus on what the church is to **Be** and **Do** with a compelling **Outward Vision**
3. Focus on **Steps** over Programmes
4. Develop A Culture of **Evaluation**
5. **Communicate** often

## **Discussion Questions:**

1. Where would you put your church/es on the life-cycle?
2. Do you think your leadership team would agree with your assessment?
3. What do you think it would take for your church to move to a healthier place on the cycle?
4. How might your congregation lift the value of prayer and what ideas can you implement to encourage your church members to pray for the church?
5. How well do you think your members can articulate the vision of the church?
6. What do you think can be done on a conference level to address life-cycle issues in our conference?

In our next regional group discussion we will look at ideas for creating and casting vision.

# Life-Cycle Assessment Tool

## Step 1

Take a moment to answer the 25 questions below which will give you an idea of where your church is at on the life-cycle. Answer with the impression that first comes to mind regarding the description of your congregation.

**5=This is exactly us**

**4=Very much describes us**

**3=Often**

**2=To some extent**

**1=Hardly**

**0=Not at all**

When your leadership team have each added their totals, average them to determine a score for that area of the life cycle.

1	There is a strong sense of Purpose at our church, we are very clear on where we are going	0	1	2	3	4	5
2	The programmes our church runs change lives	0	1	2	3	4	5
3	People are generally enthusiastic about being involved in the life of our church	0	1	2	3	4	5
4	Our church is innovative and we see new ministries and programmes often	0	1	2	3	4	5
5	I know this church is being used to reach lost people	0	1	2	3	4	5
6	I can see that we have programmes to help people grow spiritually in our church	0	1	2	3	4	5
7	Our church is a lot more than a Sabbath morning worship service	0	1	2	3	4	5
8	Our church has a good system for keeping everything running well	0	1	2	3	4	5
9	Our church leaders are visionary	0	1	2	3	4	5
10	Our church has some excellent outreach ministries	0	1	2	3	4	5
11	Most of our members are in attendance every Sabbath	0	1	2	3	4	5

12	Our church board/leadership team makes significant decisions about the future plans of our church	0	1	2	3	4	5
13	We make sure we have ways new members can understand the mission of our church	0	1	2	3	4	5
14	Our church has a variety of programmes to reach people	0	1	2	3	4	5
15	New people quickly make friends in our church family	0	1	2	3	4	5
16	Our board does a good job keeping everything sorted in our church	0	1	2	3	4	5
17	I am excited about the future plans of our church	0	1	2	3	4	5
18	Our church has a very full bulletin, there is a lot going on	0	1	2	3	4	5
19	New people are regularly becoming part of our church family	0	1	2	3	4	5
20	Our church is well managed financially	0	1	2	3	4	5
21	A lot has changed in our church over the last ten years	0	1	2	3	4	5
22	Our church is not content to be 'just the faithful little remnant'	0	1	2	3	4	5
23	People are eager to serve in our church making it easy to staff the ministries of our church	0	1	2	3	4	5
24	Our church is very well organised.	0	1	2	3	4	5

25 The Big Question:

Where would you rate your church as far as being Inward v's Outward focused?

**Inward Focus**

**1**

**2**

**3**

**Outward Focus**

**4**

**5**



## Step 2

Copy your scores for each question into the corresponding box below and then add the lines going across and write your answer in the Total box.

**Total**

Vision	1	5	9	13	17	21	
Programmes	2	6	10	14	18	22	
Relationships	3	7	11	15	19	23	
Management	4	8	12	16	20	24	

## Step 3

Now average the totals of your team for each area

	<b>My Total</b>	<b>Team Total</b>
Vision		
Programmes		
Relationships		
Management		

## Step 4

Now shape your VRPM profile

Over 15 = a capital letter for that factor

Less than 15 = a small letter for that factor

## Step 5

Now match your profile to the life cycle chart. You may not fit a profile exactly, but you will have a reasonable idea. Keep in mind there are two points on the cycle that have vrPM: One after the church has decided to turn things around and one before that decision.

## Appendix 1

# Comeback Churches

Summarised From:

Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, B&H Books, 2007.

What can be done to change the direction of churches that are merely existing or that are dying? Comeback churches come in all ages and all sizes

## **Evaluate your church's current condition.**

- This might involve an outside consultant or denominational leader
- Involve many people in the Church – Comeback leaders have recognized that the congregation has to be part of the turnaround. "Those who row the boat have little time to rock the boat"
- Churches wanting change must discuss, discuss, discuss

## **Comeback Leaders:**

- Pray Passionately
- Distinguish between obvious symptoms and underlying problems
- Take the initiative for change
- Challenge Excuses
- Make time to learn
- Model Evangelistic Passion
- Share the ministry
- Spend time with their leaders
- Understand that leadership is more about what you can get done through others than what you can do yourself
- Cast a clear and compelling vision
- Multiply themselves

## **Comeback pastors and their best leaders needed to focus their time on two groups: leaders and the lost.**

Comeback churches had new or renewed pastors or staff. 40% of comeback churches changed without changing their senior pastor; however, the senior pastor was 'renewed'. Comeback leaders got a new vision and clear direction at any age.

## **Comeback Churches:**

### **Recognise Three Faith Factors**

These three factors are always necessary to lead a comeback church:

- Renewed belief in Jesus and the mission of the church
- Renewed attitude for servant-hood, and
- More strategic prayer effort

Growing deep in love with Jesus

Growing deeply in love with the community

Growing deeply in love with the lost

- **Value Worship**
- **Take Biblical Preaching Seriously**
- **Have a Planned Process for Evangelism**
- **Connect People To Spiritual Maturity**
- **Motivate and Mobilize People**
  - o Create an atmosphere of Expectation
  - o Create an Atmosphere of Equipping
  - o Create an Atmosphere of Empowerment
- **Often Change Their Facilities to help Facilitate Growth**

### **Strategic Thinking vs Maintenance Thinking**

#### **Strategic**

Effective  
 Forward Seeker  
 Proactive  
 Dynamic  
 Flexible  
 Innovative  
 Confronts  
 Coordinated  
 Interdependent

#### **Maintenance**

Efficient  
 Failure Avoider  
 Reactive  
 Static  
 Inflexible  
 Traditional  
 Avoids  
 Fragmented  
 Independent

### **Top Ten Most Common Transformations for Comeback Churches**

- 1 Prayer
- 2 Children's Ministry
- 3 Evangelism
- 4 Youth Ministry
- 5 Leadership
- 6 Missions
- 7 Assimilation
- 8 Worship
- 9 Sunday School/Small Groups
- 10 Organizational Structure

#### **Top Three Factors:**

- Prayer,
- Evangelism
- Preaching

#### **Biggest Challenges:**

- Attitudes,
- Finances,
- Facilities

For more information, tools and powerpoint presentations go to [www.comebackchurches.com](http://www.comebackchurches.com)

**Next Regional Groups Topic: Creating, Casting, Celebrating Vision**