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# SUSTAIN AND MULTIPLY

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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*CECL is a two year voyage, powered by the winds of the Holy Spirit, to help pastors increase joy in ministry and help churches reach communities for Christ through health and outward focus. [cecl.glcc.org](http://cecl.glcc.org)*

The Center for Excellence in Congregational Leadership (CECL) began in 2003, has served over 250 pastors and churches, and continues today. This is a summary of a more technical research report about CECL, which is available from the author. The report articulates some valuable lessons learned about pastors and churches from scripture, research, and practical experience from authors, speakers, coaches and fellow pastors:

*Shared Leadership.* Leadership is about the negotiated relationships between the pastor, church leaders, and others in the church in doing God's will. The more that people experience effective leadership and witness its impact, the more they are encouraged and equipped to join the work and extend it. As educational change expert Michael Fullan has found "Shared vision or ownership is more an outcome of a quality process than it is a precondition." (2009, p. 2). An especially effective way to exercise shared leadership is for pastors to give key members of their audience an opportunity to give regular and quality feedback on their preaching **before** everyone else hears it (Carrell, 2008).

*Balance.* Health and growth are clearly related in churches (Schalk, 1999), yet growth can occur in the short term without paying adequate attention to pastor and/or church team health. Long-term church health and growth requires a healthy pastor and church team (Scazzero, 2003). Therefore, we are not looking for a "silver bullet" that brings about growth at any cost. We are looking for sustainable leadership models that are promising for implementation by "flesh and blood" pastors and church teams who want to live a faithful and balanced Christian life.

*Outward Focus.* Whether we are moved by "Love your neighbor as yourself," "Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers, that you do unto me," "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends," or some other verse, the call to outward focus is clear in scripture. Finding creative and effective ways to bring about awareness of, and growth in Christ has always been central to our mission, and churches that maintain an outward focus are much more likely to be growing.

*Customization.* There have been some large-scale efforts to identify nearly universal principles and practices for church health and growth. One such system is Natural Church Development ([www.ncd-international.com](http://www.ncd-international.com)), which led to a widely implemented survey that has been used in over 70 countries and 40,000 churches since the early 1990's. More recently, the Reveal study, which grew out of Willow Creek Church near Chicago ([www.revealnow.com](http://www.revealnow.com)) has resulted in a survey implemented with thousands of churchgoers (Hawkins & Parkinson, 2007). These systems are valuable, and will continue to provide meaningful and useful information to many churches. However, there is no substitute for a committed group of individuals learning what God is planning to do through them, following their specific church mission, in its unique context. It seems that there are few similarities between the CECL pastors and churches that have experienced the greatest improvement. No single tool or person can be credited.

## Design of the CECL Sustainability Study

Given the substantial improvements in pastors and churches during CECL, we wanted to determine the degree to which progress continued after the pastors and churches had completed the program. We reasoned that the churches most likely to continue to improve after CECL were those churches that experienced the most improvement during the program. In the previous CECL evaluation work, “most improved” churches had already been identified. During the time in which these churches were involved in CECL, they experienced two or more of the following:

- Ten percent or greater annual increase in attendance
- Ten percent or greater annual increase in weekly offerings
- Five stage or greater improvement in a CECL coach rating of church health (described in evaluation report)
- Improvement of eight points or more on the Natural Church Development survey average.

However, in addition to attaining some understanding of the quantitative improvement in these churches, we wanted to know which resources they thought were most useful, and what specific daily and weekly practices were critical to their success. Further, in order to help share these lessons learned with other pastors and church teams, we sought to develop a theory that would incorporate key concepts in prior work on pastor and church change. Of the 269 churches involved in CECL, 19 churches saw the greatest improvement during the program, and were recruited for this study. Of these, 18 (95%) were still led by the same pastor at the time of this study. Out of the 18 churches eligible for inclusion in the study, senior pastors responded from 15 (83%) of them.

## Participating Pastors and Churches

|                    |                                   |                   |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| Paul Berthiaume    | Jacob's Well                      | Eau Claire, WI    |
| Rick Bishop        | Community Baptist Church          | Glenrock, WY      |
| Steve Brinkman     | Crossroads Church                 | Pewaukee, WI      |
| Gary Britton       | Judson Baptist                    | Kokomo, IN        |
| Tim Erickson       | Bethel Baptist Church             | Janesville, WI    |
| Ryan Follis        | First Baptist Church              | Nokomis, IL       |
| Dennis Hammons     | Shawnee Heights Baptist Church    | Muncie, IN        |
| Homer Hanshaw      | First Baptist Church              | East Alton, IL    |
| Glenn Herschberger | Real Hope Community Church        | Lake Mills, WI    |
| Wally Holt         | First Baptist Church              | Macomb, IL        |
| Hans Kistner       | First Baptist Church              | Santa Barbara, CA |
| Roger Knowlton     | Edgewood Community Church         | Waupun, WI        |
| Greg Lund          | Frederick Evangelical Free Church | Frederick, WI     |
| Steve Malson       | Mason Community Church            | Mason, MI         |
| Mark Spencer       | First Baptist Church              | Rochester, IN     |

## Sustainability in Pastors and Churches

There were four major findings from the study:

1. CECL Pastors are Staying Strong. Pastors experienced increases from the start to the end of CECL on each of the pastor survey scales: *Visioning and Strategic Planning*, *Family and Ministry Balance*, *Spiritual Growth*, *Accountability and Leadership Tools*. At the follow-up, pastors were at about the same level as at the end of CECL. Their perception of their health was more positive than negative, and remained at that level during CECL and at follow up. Pastors reported a decrease in their potential for dropout during CECL, and the risk of dropout remained low at the follow-up.
2. CECL Pastors are Still Integral to the Church Team. From the start to the end of CECL, there were large increases in pastor ratings of their leadership and relationship with their church team, and these ratings generally remained high at the follow-up. Pastors tended to perceive a drop in cooperation from their church team from the end of CECL to the follow-up, yet this was still a higher rating they gave than at the start of CECL.
3. CECL Churches are Still Growing. Two-thirds of the churches experienced an increase in attendance from the start of CECL to the follow-up. Seven of the 15 had conducted a building project after CECL. Two of the churches had birthed new churches.
4. CECL Churches are Still Giving More. Consistent with earlier findings, most CECL churches have experienced substantial increases in giving. After adjusting for inflation, the 15 churches in this study collectively received over half a million dollars more than they had by the end of CECL. Just in 1-2 years in this small portion of CECL churches (8.7% of the entire group), nearly one third (31.7%) of the amount of the original Lilly Endowment investment in this program was raised for Kingdom work!

## CRISP Theory

After summarizing some of the most important scripture and principles in the books that pastors indicated were most helpful for them and their church, I went back to look for how the specific practices matched up with this base of wisdom and knowledge. I also intended to describe this intersection between principles and practice in a format that other pastors and church leaders might find accessible and useful. Five interrelated priorities for pastors and leaders began to emerge as I “triangulated” across the multiple sources of evidence:

|             |                                                            |
|-------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Connected   | Strengthening my relationship with God and others          |
| Real        | Seeking and sharing the truth                              |
| Integrated  | Systematizing according to priorities                      |
| Sustainable | Recognizing and building on what will last                 |
| Playful     | Risk-taking to bring out the treasure within and beyond us |

Each of these priorities has been identified as a critical component for personal and/or organizational change by many researchers, speakers and authors. However, I argue that the greatest long term personal and organizational benefit is achieved when all of these priorities are incorporated as appropriate in daily and weekly life. The summary of CRISP theory as applied to CECL on the remaining pages is certainly not intended to give leaders “all they need to know” to do their part to bring about change in their congregation, but to provide an overview of some of the key priorities and refer the reader to many fine resources in these areas. It is also a starting point for testing this theory in the lives of other pastors and leaders, and in other organizations.

**If this summary sparks a response in you, please drop us a line! [Tom@ArrowResearch.org](mailto:Tom@ArrowResearch.org) or 651-353-7851**

## Specific Practices for Pastors

| Priority    | Best Practices and Supporting Scripture                                                                                                           | How Sustaining Pastors Describe it                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| CONNECTED   | First and foremost, worship God, and seek his direction ( <i>Mark 12:29-30; Phil 4:19</i> )                                                       | Daily quiet time (prayer and meditation)<br>Faithful expectation and optimism                                                                                                                          |
|             | Solid relationships with family, friends and peers ( <i>Mark 12:31; Phil 1:3; Col 1:3-6; Col 3:12-14</i> )                                        | Personal time with family<br>Contacts with peers, members<br>Face-to-face connections<br>Listening to people and asking “how can I help?”                                                              |
| REAL        | Maintain biblical boundaries and accountability ( <i>Prov 29:18; Jos 1:7-8; Mark 1:15; John 3:17; 2 Cor 3:18</i> )                                | Regular and enriching Bible study time<br>Accountability group<br>Curbing my critical attitude                                                                                                         |
| INTEGRATED  | Develop, cast and re-cast the vision ( <i>Lam 2:14;</i> )                                                                                         | Study time<br>Ensure that messages are relevant, biblical and impact audience<br>Sermon preparation<br>Vision casting                                                                                  |
|             | Model the vision in the community ( <i>John 15:13; 1 Cor 9:19-23; Col 1:28-29</i> )                                                               | Loving people (in the community)<br>Regular involvement with non-believers<br>Contacts with visitors                                                                                                   |
| SUSTAINABLE | Build and extend leadership capacity ( <i>Eph 4:11-12</i> )                                                                                       | Leadership development<br>Encouraging board governance<br>Consensus building<br>Church administration and purposeful leadership<br>Patience and perseverance with leadership team, context             |
|             | Maintain healthy ministry-life balance ( <i>Mt 11: 28-30; Jer 29:11;</i> )                                                                        | Weekly one-day retreat<br>Use a coach or mentor                                                                                                                                                        |
| PLAYFUL     | Recognize gifts and strengths and serve with joy, humor, creativity, courage ( <i>Pshp 4:13; Jos 1:6,9; Mark 12:29; Eph 6:10; Jam 1:2-4, 12</i> ) | Living what I believe I’m called to<br>Experiencing strong peer friendships I’ve never had before<br>Active in competitive sports<br>Using gifts of charisma and social skills to connect with leaders |

## Specific Church Practices

| Priority    | Best Practices and Supporting Scripture                                                                                               | How it was Implemented in Sustaining Churches                                                                                                 |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| CONNECTED   | First and foremost, worship God, and seek his direction ( <i>Prov 16:3; 2 Chr 7:14a; Mark 12:29-30; Eph 3:20-21; 1 John 4: 7-10</i> ) | Individual and corporate prayer<br>Inspiring worship<br>Including others in worship planning<br>Expecting God to interrupt us with his spirit |
|             | Love and fellowship in the body ( <i>Php 2:1-2; Mark 12:31; 1 John 4:7</i> )                                                          | Adult growth groups                                                                                                                           |
| REAL        | Maintain biblical boundaries and accountability ( <i>2 Chr 7:14b; 1 Cor 4:1-4; Gal 5:24-26; Jam 4:8</i> )                             | Expectation of biblical atmosphere<br>Reminder that every believer is to reflect the character and priorities of Christ                       |
| INTEGRATED  | Designed around one simple, unifying spiritual growth process ( <i>Php 2:1-2</i> )                                                    | Implementing a five-point spiritual growth model<br>Assimilation practices                                                                    |
|             | Maintain a shared leadership team ( <i>Eph 4:11-16</i> )                                                                              | Unified and supportive ministry team<br>Discussing and implementing the vision<br>Including others in leadership and study                    |
|             | Maintain an outward focus in community ( <i>Mark 12:31; Matt 28:18-20; Luke 19:10; John 3:16-17; 1 Cor 9:19-20; 1 John 4:11</i> )     | Living out the mission statement – be a friend                                                                                                |
| SUSTAINABLE | Staff lead and equip, laypeople minister ( <i>Titus 3:14; James 2:26</i> )                                                            | Structured for high rate of ministry involvement<br>Leadership development<br>Expect others to participate                                    |
|             | Support healthy ministry-life balance for all ( <i>Php 2:3-5</i> )                                                                    | Maintain balance<br>Emphasize importance of personal time with family                                                                         |
| PLAYFUL     | Recognize gifts and strengths and serve with joy and creativity ( <i>Php 2:14-16; Php 4:13; Eph 4:11; Gal 5:22-23</i> )               | Gift-oriented ministries<br>Develop the church's own spiritual growth model                                                                   |

## Appendix: Summary of Key Findings in Books Multiple Pastors Found Most Helpful in their Work as a Pastor, and/or for Their Church

After noting some of the themes in the scripture verses, books and regular practices mentioned by pastors, I found some common elements: **C**onected, **R**eal, **I**ntegrated, **S**ustainable, and **P**layful. These elements are described in greater detail in the “Theory Building” section of this report.

| Book (Authors)                  | Key Findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | C | R | I | S | P |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Simple Church (Rainer & Geiger) | “A simple church is a congregation designed around a straightforward and strategic process that moves people through the stages of spiritual growth. The leadership and the church are clear about the process (clarity) and are committed to executing it. The process flows logically (movement) and is implemented in each area of the church (alignment). The church abandons everything that is not in the process (focus).” (p. 67-68). Examples of Jesus’ simplicity – greatest commandment, great commission, his “light burden,” and removing “clutter” in marketplace. Extensive communication methods are employed and action plans are used to ensure that the work of staff and ministry leaders is aligned and focused.                                                                 | x | x | x | x |   |
| Winning on Purpose (Kaiser)     | Accountable Leadership: the board governs, the pastor leads, the staff manages, and the congregation ministers. Use board-designed guiding principles, and scheduling tools (action plans by hour and year). With customization, Accountable Leadership can address inward focus, anarchy, excessive democracy, bureaucracy, and/or oligarchy in the church or denomination. Ask “do we really want to win [disciples]?” If so, we must make this our mission, and all other purposes must be subject to it (e.g., positive peer groups for kids, teaching the Bible, opposing social evils, overcoming past hurts, powerful worship experience, helping the poor). To empower, we must establish boundaries. Accountability is how we keep the score (regular feedback on what is really happening). |   | x | x | x |   |
| Transitioning (Southerland)     | Church growth comes from: being purpose-driven, focusing on unchurched, contemporary worship, staff lead and equip, and lay people minister, systematic small group assimilation plan, adding Saturday night services, Sunday small groups instead of Sunday school. Vision team for feedback, balance, accountability, fellowship. Visioning is best birthed out of thorough knowledge. The pastor changes the most. Expect opposition when God moves.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | x | x | x |   |   |

| Book<br>(Authors)                     | Key Findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | C | R | I | S | P |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Emotionally-Healthy Church (Scazzero) | Emotionally-healthy individuals and churches: look beneath the surface [in touch with emotions, able to process], break the power of the past [intentionality, not blindly repeating generational sin], live in brokenness and vulnerability [C], receive the gift of limits [R], embrace grieving and loss [C], and make incarnation your model for loving well [C]. It is not possible for a Christian to be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature. Emotional adults respect and love others without having to change them or becoming critical and judgmental. I don't expect anyone to be perfect in meeting my relational needs. I love people for who they are not for what they can give me or how they behave. I take responsibility for my own thoughts, words and actions. Accurately assessing my own limits, strengths and weaknesses, and freely discuss them [P]. I am deeply convinced that I am absolutely loved by Christ, and that I have nothing to prove. [see survey questions, p. 60-63.] | x | x |   | x | x |
| Purpose-Driven Life (Warren)          | "This is more than a book; it is a guide to a 40-day spiritual journey that will enable you to discover the answer to life's most important question: What on earth am I here for?" (p. 9) We were planned for God's pleasure (worship and relationship with God). We have been formed for God's family (fellowship in the church). We were created to become like Christ (spiritual transformation and growth). We have been shaped for serving God (identifying and using our spiritual gifts, heart, abilities, personality and experience for God's purposes). We were made for a mission (using our testimony, life lessons, godly passions and good news to fulfill the Great Commission with purpose and balance).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | x | x | x | x | x |
| Divine Conspiracy (Willard)           | Discipleship to Jesus is the heart of the gospel. Rather than "waiting for heaven" with assurance of salvation, we can and should participate now in the eternal kingdom, while we are living on earth. We cannot get lulled into the casual "upside-down" culture, but need to keep our Christian identity and mission clear, and serve diligently. "When we see Jesus as he is, we must turn away or else shamelessly adore him." (p. 19). The limited impact of the church on our culture may not be "in spite" of our teaching, but because of our teaching. The kingdom of God is what God is doing now and will do forever.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | x | x |   |   |   |
| The Treasure Principle (Alcorn)       | Key concepts: You can't take it with you--but you can send it on ahead. God owns everything. I'm His money manager. My heart always goes where I put God's money. Heaven, not earth, is my home. I should live not for the dot [life on earth] but for the line [eternity/life in heaven]. Giving is the only antidote to materialism. God prospers me not to raise my standard of living, but to raise my standard of giving.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |   | x | x | x |   |