

“A Resource for Helping Congregations Review Their Life Cycle”
Northwestern Ohio District
Church of the Nazarene

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface:	Do Not Be Afraid.	Page 2
Chapter 1:	The End of an Era, not the End of the Story. God is Faithful!	Page 3
Chapter 2:	The Life Cycle of a Congregation. Thoughts on Leaving a Legacy for the Future.	Page 5
Chapter 3:	The Discernment Process: What is God Calling our Congregation To Do?	Page 9
Chapter 4:	Steps in Closing A Congregation.	Page 11
Chapter 5:	Managing Closure, Ending in Hope.	Page 14
Appendix A:	Worksheet on Congregational Sustainability	Page 15
Appendix B:	Indicators for Church Closure: McIntosh Resource	Page 17
Appendix C:	A Checklist for Steps in Closing a Congregation	Page 20
Appendix D:	Manual paragraphs related to church closures	Page 21
Appendix E:	Options for Churches when Facing Issues of Survival.	Page 22

Note: “A Resource for the Closing of Congregations” prepared by the Congregational Asset Management Task Force of the Lower Susquehanna Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) was used as a resource in the development of this document. That manual included material adapted and used by permission from Legacy Churches, by Stephen Gray and Franklin Dumond; ChurchSmart Resources, 2009, as well as “Ending With Hope: A Resource for Closing Congregations”, by Beth Ann Gaede, used with permission from the Alban Institute. Copyright © 2002 by The Alban Institute, Herndon, VA. All rights reserved.

Preface: Do Not Be Afraid.

This manual is for use by the District Resource Center and local congregations as a local congregation begins to acknowledge that their ability to survive may be in question. It is for congregations that are wondering about their options for the future. It is for congregations that are wondering if they are sustainable for mission and ministry and are wondering what the next steps should be. This manual does not provide all the answers. But our hope is that it will help congregations begin asking the right questions.

The purpose of the Northwestern Ohio District is to expand the kingdom by ***Resourcing and Inspiring Local Churches to build leaders who will Plant, Revitalize, and Remake all kinds of Churches to reach all kinds of people*** in the Northwestern Ohio.” We realize, however, that local congregations, for a number of reasons, can reach a point where their ability to sustain themselves becomes questionable. Certainly, our purpose is not to close congregations. We do, however, want to help congregations that have acknowledged their survival may be at risk to think through their options, and to understand that in some situations, closure can be a faithful and life-giving decision.

Our goal is to offer encouragement for congregations that are wondering about their continued sustainability, and to provide practical guidance to congregations that are considering closure.

Chapter 1: The End of an Era is not the End of the Story. God is Faithful.

Joshua and the Promised Land.

If you are part of a congregation that is fearful and anxious about the future of your church, consider the story of Joshua on the verge of the Promised Land. Can you be honest about the realities of your congregation? If considering your church's future causes you to mourn about its possible lost future, can you celebrate and mourn at the same time? Could God be proclaiming the end of one era, but also continuing his promise in a new way? The lessons Joshua received from God about tough times can be relevant for us today.

Having received instructions and encouragement from the Lord, Joshua began to prepare to cross the Jordan into Canaan. He commanded the officers to instruct the people in the camp to prepare provisions and be ready in three days to cross the Jordan and go into the Promised Land. Joshua told his people to get prepared and be ready to move forward. These lessons can apply to us as we examine the health and viability of our own congregations.

The temptations of the “good old days”.

God told Joshua, “Don’t live in the past. Prepare for the future. Move on.” God wanted the Israelites to look forward, not back. He also wants us to look forward, not back. He wants us to prepare for the future that we cannot see.

The desire to return to a more secure and vibrant past is understandable. If only we could develop a new program, or call a more enthusiastic pastor, then maybe everything would be better. Many of us would rather long for the “good old days” than face difficult realities in the present.

The dream of reliving the “good old days” by returning to a period of growth and glory is strong in many of congregations. Again, this is understandable, for God has done wonderful things through our congregations. Faith has been nurtured and mission has been accomplished through the life of our congregations. But the reality may be that God is telling us, just as he told the Israelites: “Don’t look back at the way things were but look forward to see what I will do”.

Be strong and courageous, for God is with you.

When we face the reality that our congregation may be in crisis, we may feel overwhelmed with a wide variety of thoughts and feelings. When we face the possibility of ending and closure, it's not uncommon to ask questions like: What did we do wrong? Were we not faithful enough? Will a new building program or a new pastor return us to the “good old days”? But as we ask these questions, also consider: Was God's plan for the Israelites completed once Moses died? Or was God preparing for a new era, a different beginning?

In struggling with the reality of your church, could it be that God has accomplished everything He intended through your particular congregation? Could God be telling you

that your work is done, and that a new ministry is being formed? Remember, congregations were not meant to last forever. The kingdom of God is forever, but individual churches are not. Every church the Apostle Paul planted no longer exists! We are here because of the legacy of congregations that have come before us. Perhaps, God is telling us to pass that legacy forward in a new fashion, a new form, a new ministry. God's plan will not be stopped by closing the doors of a church building! As God said to Joshua, "Don't live in the past. Prepare for the future. Move on." Preparing for the future and moving on may mean letting go!

In the life of a church, no issue can be tougher than considering the end of an era. Will this experience cause pain, anxiety, confusion, and doubt? Yes. Will you become discouraged and fearful, thinking that you cannot succeed? Possibly. But as you travel through this process, remember to celebrate all that God has accomplished through your ministry. And remember that, as with Joshua, God will never forsake you.

If the future of your church is uncertain with the possibility of your church being closed, you are not alone. Every year, thousands of churches close across the U.S. Even in the midst of this reality, the future is not without hope. God still has a plan and a purpose for every local congregation. The kingdom will prevail. It is essential that we keep in mind that the decision to close a congregation can be a faithful and life-giving choice.

What is God's goal for you and your congregation?

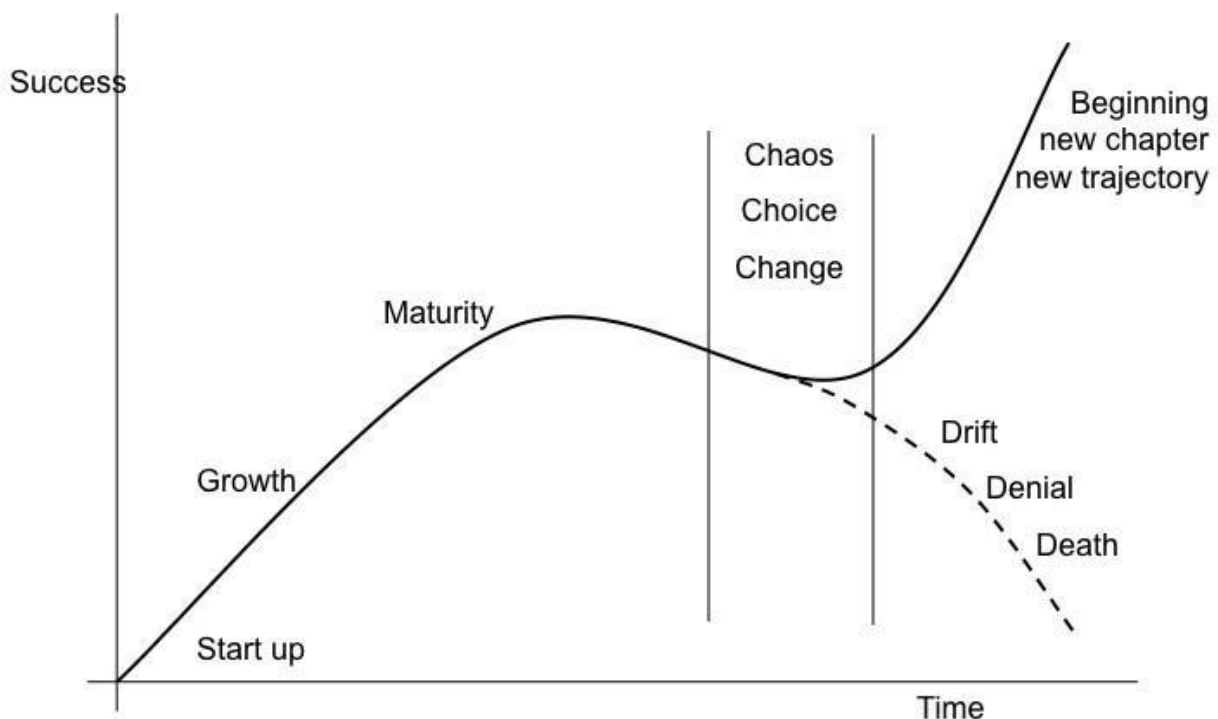
"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last." John 15:16

Chapter 2: The Life Cycle of a Congregation: Thoughts on Leaving a Legacy for the Future

Key Realities of a church life cycle:

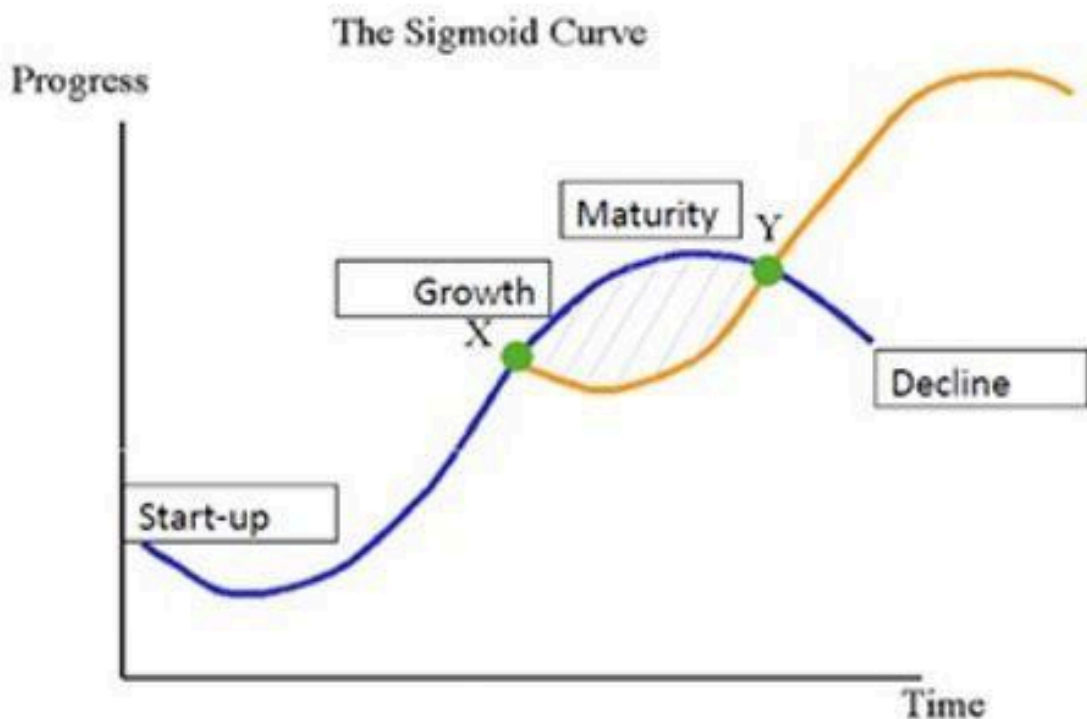
- Every church has a life cycle
- Every church dies if it doesn't reinvent and embrace the chaos of change and new paradigms, which in turn creates a new life cycle.
- Most churches avoid this because it always means loss and chaos before growth and new birth.
- If a church waits too long to embrace chaos and make needed changes to begin a new life cycle, it will reach the point of no return and need to make decisions regarding how to die well and leave a legacy with what remains.

The life cycle of a church:



Based on work of Charles Handy, The Empty Raincoat

There are key moments in the life cycle of a church where decisions made will impact the future of the church. This can be represented in what is called the “Sigmoid Curve.”



Every church dies if it doesn't reinvent and embrace the chaos of change and the introduction of new paradigms, which in turn creates a new life cycle. The yellow line represents the growth and revitalization that's possible when a new life cycle is created. New life always requires loss and chaos before growth and new birth can take place.

Times of crisis and transition can provide good opportunities for a congregation to return to the basic questions: What is God calling us to do, at this time and in this place? What is our purpose? Why are we here? The danger is that it is tempting to avoid wrestling with these questions until it is almost too late. It is better to ask these questions when a congregation is in the flourishing, plateau, or even in the early declining stages of the life cycle. By the time a congregation is actually moving into the later stages of its lifecycle, congregants may be too anxious and worn out to do the hard work of corporate discernment. By that time, financial and material resources may also be severely limited.

The book, "Steering through Chaos" by Scott Wilson can be a very helpful resource for a congregation in navigating some of the challenges of this point in a congregation's life cycle!

It is smart to be proactive about starting this conversation **before** a congregation is too far along on the downside of the life cycle. This is just good common sense. It is also better stewardship. The discernment process about a congregation's future is a serious undertaking! Any options such as revitalization, merger, relocation, or closure will involve significant investment in many areas. All this takes resources of time, people, and finances. It is wise to plan ahead. The problem with individuals and with congregations is that we often choose to live in denial of the realities we are facing.

Appendix "A", Page 15, Appendix "B", Page 17, are valuable tools to assist a Congregation in evaluating the (1) Situation the Congregation is Facing (2) What the next steps should be regarding the future of the church!

Prayer is crucial. Sustained prayer and conversation about the congregation's mission can lead to new directions for ministry and a new sense of focus and purpose. Sometimes, such prayer and conversation help a congregation to identify assets and resources the congregation didn't realize it had, so that ministry in that place can continue for a time in new ways.

Sometimes, sustained prayer and conversation about mission leads to the realization that God is calling a congregation to close. **Grief is inevitable but closing may also be an opportunity to use the congregation's resources to continue God's mission in another way or in another place.**

There are times when bringing the life of a congregation to an honorable ending may be a more faithful response to God's call than clinging to survival.

Death and dying.

Just as individuals who experience change and loss go through stages of grief, so do congregations. It is important to acknowledge the stages of grief as they are experienced by congregational members, lay leaders, and pastoral leaders. The classic stages of grief are denial, bargaining, anger, depression, and acceptance. As with any grief, there is no set timeline, nor is there a set order for moving through these stages. Different issues will affect different people in different ways. Different people within the congregation will be at different places in the grief cycle at any given time. It is important that we acknowledge this, and respect where each person is in their grief process.

Do not underestimate the strength that comes from having companions on the journey. Mutual conversation and consolation among the community of believers is truly a means of God's grace. Especially during difficult times, draw on the strength and insight that comes from corporate worship, bible study, and prayer.

Do not underestimate the power and significance of material things. It is normal for people to have powerful emotional attachments to such things as pews, particular furnishings and even items they have donated over the years or given in honor of someone. This is not a matter of idolatry. Everything in a church develops layers of

meaning over time. Every object can accumulate layers of stories and powerful emotional feelings. Find ways to respect and honor the significance of these objects, even—and especially—as you are letting go.

Leaving a legacy.

Closing a congregation does not have to mean an end to ministry. In fact, closing may actually be a way of extending and expanding a congregation's ministry. Just as an individual should plan ahead, so a congregation nearing the end of its life cycle can plan ahead how to use its resources to continue serving God and neighbor in faithful witness. Use the following questions and issues as starting points for your discernment:

- What are the congregation's assets? Look at financial assets, buildings and land, but also consider knowledge, experience, passions, imagination, and spiritual gifts.
- Could the congregation's resources be used to plant a new congregation, or to support mission and evangelism in other ways?
- Could the church building and grounds be used in new ways to serve the local community?
- Can congregational furnishings and other property be sold, gifted, or re-purposed in ways so that ministry can continue?
- Identify objects and documents that have real historical value. Take steps to preserve and archive these so that others can learn from them.
- Find ways to tell, share, celebrate and preserve the congregation's story. This is also a Legacy for the wider church.

Chapter 3: The Discernment Process: What is God Calling our Congregation to Do?

Helping a Congregation Make Decisions about its Sustainability

“What is God calling this congregation to do?”

This is the core question that must be answered.

As noted earlier individual congregations are not immortal. The closure of a congregation does not signify failure. A congregation like an individual is born, grows, may get sick, can recover, will age and if it doesn't re-invent itself at critical times in its life cycle, will eventually die. The churches of the First Century in the Book of Acts no longer exist, but their legacy lives on in the churches today.

God was not downplaying the significance of Moses' leadership with the Hebrew people when God turned to Joshua to push forward when Moses died. God asked Joshua to do the work that needed to be done. Past history and events should be considered a blessing and be celebrated, but time moves on and so must our ways of accomplishing ministry. Look forward and see what God can do.

When a congregation reaches the point where it's future may be at risk, several options could be considered as part of the way forward to continue to invest itself in the Kingdom. The following are some of the possibilities:

1. Relaunch: A decision to close an existing church and re-launch as a new church, with new leadership (pastor), new name, new identity, interim governance, new ministry approach and overall new philosophy of ministry.
2. Restart: This is the scenario in which the existing church surrenders assets, including property and day-to-day decision making to the District Resource Center with the goal of starting a new church.
3. Merger/Marriage: The joining together of an existing unhealthy or declining church and a healthy existing church or church plant.
4. Campus/Adoption: The adoption or absorption of an existing church in decline or near death by a larger healthy church.
5. A PAC (Parent Affiliated Congregation): A PAC is a new ministry (organic church, multi-site, multi-congregational, or NewStart) that is reported as affiliated with a parent church. A PAC has a leader or pastor who is responsible for pastoral care of the group and is connected with a parent church.
6. Closure of Church/Disposition of Property: The existing church closes, and assets and property are transferred to the District Resource Center under the supervision of the District Advisory Board for the planting of new churches as provided for in the Nazarene Manual.

*A more complete description of these options can be found in Appendix E that outlines “Options for Churches When Facing Issues of Survival”.

A decision to close a congregation is not easy. Emotions run high, and a sense of failure may pervade the hearts and minds of those remaining. The question before us is — **“Is this congregation sustainable?”** The main issue is — **At this point in our history, can we make meaningful the Gospel of Jesus Christ where God has placed us?**

Often when a congregation is in a fight for survival, it may lose its sense of vision and mission. A congregation needs enough attendance to make itself look, feel and sound alive. A good worship environment is at least 50 adults gathered together. Visitors are not likely to return if the church is perceived as dying. **So, we can panic, or we can plan.**

We are called to be Kingdom Builders. A congregation that closes can be the beginning of something greater with the purposeful planting of new ministries that spread the good news of Christ. The starting point for the discernment process should always begin with prayer. After asking for God’s wisdom and direction, discussing the following questions will help in the discernment process:

1. How is this congregation living out its mission?
2. What barriers exist that hinder the fulfillment of its mission?
3. Can the congregation overcome these barriers?

Resources to assist in answering the above critical questions

1. The SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis is a useful tool to use as part of the discernment process. The results of the SWOT analysis can assist a congregation in clarifying the realities being faced relative to its ability to sustain itself as a fruitful kingdom entity.
2. Appendix A: Worksheet on Congregational Sustainability
3. Appendix B: “When to Close a Church” by Gary L McIntosh

Working through these resources will be a great help in what the next steps should be!



Chapter 4: Steps in Closing a Congregation

Note: Involvement of Responsible Personnel in the District Resource Center

The District Superintendent or his/her designee will be directly involved in all matters related to the closing of a church. When a congregation has initial concerns that its ability to sustain itself is in question, contact should be made with the District Superintendent. The District Superintendent or appropriate staff person can be very helpful in providing guidance and resources to assist the pastor, church board and congregation in determining options that are available.

If the discernment process indicates that the best option is for the church to be closed, there are two important points always to keep in mind:

1. District personnel and congregational leaders must communicate clearly and often with congregation members, being completely transparent about the issues to be decided and the meetings that will take place to make these decisions.
2. Thorough minutes must be kept of all discussions and actions

The “Manual” of the Church of the Nazarene provides important guidance related to a church being declared “Inactive.” Inactive status is the first step in the closure of a church and provides for other options to be explored. (See Appendix D) Page 21.

The following items are important parts of the process of closing a church and should be given careful attention:

Remember the Stages of Grief

While going through the process of deciding to close a congregation and then following through with all the steps necessary for the closing, all involved will likely go through the various stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Unfortunately, not everyone will go through the stages in lockstep nor at the same

speed. Understanding of and proper attention to each person's stage in the grief process will facilitate following the steps needed to close the congregation.

Be reminded of the outcome of the discernment process.

The ultimate decision to be made by a congregation is what God desires of it. There can be many variables that may lead to a decision that closing the church is the best option. Once a determination is made that it might be best to close, the congregation enters a time of discernment of how to best leave a legacy and provide new life from this closing.

Collaborate with the District

Whenever the possibility of closing might begin to be entertained by a congregation, the District Superintendent should be contacted immediately. The District Superintendent as well as other personnel charged with assisting congregations when closing seems likely can provide the resources and guidance needed for congregational leaders.

Focus on key decisions

The closing of a congregation involves two primary decisions:

1. When to close, including a process that is to be followed and whenever possible include a final celebration worship service.
2. What to do with the property and resources of the congregation.

Arrange for the disposition of important records

1. Arrangements must be made to gather all congregational records, including membership records, board meeting minutes, financial records, contracts for equipment, loan agreements, etc
2. Determine which records are required for the formal closing of the congregation and which need to be archived.
3. Plan for the proper disposal of records no longer needed.
4. Visual materials such as photographs, videotapes, and films also provide a record of the congregation. Determination will need to be made of which visual materials are to be retained and how to best archive them.
5. Develop a list of all records.

Pay close attention to legal issues:

1. The process described in the 2017-2021 Manual of the Church of the Nazarene will be followed in closing a church. (See Appendix D, Manual paragraphs 106ff) Page 21
2. In the process of closing a church, the District Resource Center will provide guidance through the entire process. The District Resource Center will be directly involved in caring for required denominational documents as well as legal documents including requirements of any county, state and federal entities.

Concern related to church membership

Every effort should be made to arrange for any remaining members of the church being closed to transfer membership to another Nazarene congregation if at all possible.

Care for the Pastor

If a pastor is in place at the time of the closure of a church, every effort should be made to finalize any remaining outstanding financial obligations to the pastor and any legal records which need filed.

Arrangements for the property and contents:

1. Inventory the contents of the building(s).
2. Arrange to secure the building(s) until ownership is transferred. Security includes maintaining fire and liability insurance, keeping the buildings securely locked, etc.
3. An “on-site” person approved by the District Resource Center must be identified to regularly check the building and maintain needed utilities. Thermostat settings must be maintained to assure the building is adequately ventilated to maintain the health of the building.
4. No utilities should be disconnected without the approval of appropriate personnel at the District Resource Center.
5. Arrangements must be made for all locks to be changed no later than 14 days following the final worship service.
6. Arrange for the exterior of the property to be maintained (lawn mowing, weed control etc.)
7. In coordination with appropriate personnel at the District Resource Center, decide what to do with the contents of the building(s).
8. At the time a church is declared “inactive” as the first step in closure, a policy should be drafted, in coordination with the District Resource Center, regarding disposition of contents and furnishings of the building.

Financial

1. Catalog all financial accounts.
2. Arrange for bills to be paid promptly until closing is finalized. Close coordination with the appropriate personnel in the District Resource Center is required.
3. Arrange with the District Resource Center the transfer of signatories on accounts held with any financial institution. Also determine how to disburse any remaining funds and then disburse them in coordination with appropriate personnel in the District Resource Center.

Chapter 5: Managing Closure, Ending in Hope

As noted above, in the multi-step process of closing, a congregation will experience a variety of emotions of varying degrees: grief and nostalgia, anxiety and hopefulness about the future. Some of the members may feel relieved; some may worry that by closing, your congregation and its witness will be forgotten.

A final gathering time and service can be an important way to acknowledge your congregation's history and witness in the community; it can give voice to the pain of loss that many are feeling about closing; it can be a lasting testimony to the community. Gathering with members, friends, the community at large, prior pastor(s) and past attendees of the church is a public sign that God's mission continues and extends beyond our temporary buildings.

Appendix "C" provides some suggested steps your congregation may want to consider as you plan for the final gathering and service (See Page 21).

Steps to consider when planning the final service:

Personnel at the District Resource Center are available as a resource in planning a final service. It is best, however, for the local church to take primary responsibility for arranging the final service. If a pastor is in place, he should appoint a committee to assist with the planning of the service itself as well as the logistics necessary to organize and advertise the service. If there is no pastor in place, district personnel will be available to provide assistance.

The following items will be helpful in planning:

1. Have a meal. For centuries, when Christians gather to mark a life-changing occasion, food is shared. Think what weddings and funerals would be without the meal to share in. Sharing one last meal using the space of the building that your congregation is leaving, is a testament to your shared spiritual life together in this place.
2. Invite current and former members and former pastors as appropriate.
3. When appropriate, depending on the circumstances of each situation, consider inviting the community/neighborhood.
4. Make the service a true worship service. Consider appropriate scripture readings, prayers, responsive readings, etc. Give opportunity for members and attenders to share their memories of the impact the congregation has had on their life.
5. Plan all elements of the service with care and attention.

Appendix A: Worksheet on Congregational Sustainability

Using attendance figures for the previous ten years, chart your congregation's average attendance. This information is available through the Research Services at the Global Ministries Center. Follow this link:

<https://findachurch.nazarene.org/reports>

Then use the following questions as a springboard for further discussion.

YES/ NO

- ___ ___ 1. Do we have a pattern of growth in attendance?
- ___ ___ 2. Will our trend of growth, plateau or decline allow us to thrive and develop ministry for the future in this place?
- ___ ___ 3. Can we maintain our own existence as a congregation and provide ministry in the community?
- ___ ___ 4. Can we survive without support from outside the normal tithes and offerings of the congregation.
- ___ ___ 5. Do we have sufficient numbers of people to volunteer for ministry within the congregation and outreach into the community?
- ___ ___ 6. Are new efforts in evangelism and Christian Education feasible?
- ___ ___ 7. Are there sufficient funds & interested membership to minister within the congregation as well as outreach into the community and world?
- ___ ___ 8. Are we experiencing the presence of first-time visitors on a regular basis?
- ___ ___ 9. Do they return for a second or a third visit?
- ___ ___ 10. Do 20-25% of our first-time visitors eventually join the congregation?
- ___ ___ 11. Is the congregation's main focus on outreach/evangelism?
- ___ ___ 12. Is the congregation striving to do more than trying to survive?
- ___ ___ 13. Has the congregation grown in the last five years?
- ___ ___ 14. Do we have enough members to do ministry well?
- ___ ___ 15. Does giving in the congregation enable "Great Commission" work, or does most of the giving go towards maintenance and survival?
- ___ ___ 16. Are there young families active in the church?
- ___ ___ 17. Has the congregation maintained a good level of stewardship including several families (10-12) who tithe faithfully to the congregation?
- ___ ___ 18. Is the congregation willing/able to adapt its ministry and lifestyle in order to develop the ministries that will meet the needs of a changing community?
- ___ ___ 19. Is the present facility physically adaptable for use?
- ___ ___ 20. Can the congregation afford the repairs that are needed to use these facilities for ministry?

If you marked 5 answers “No”, we suggest you contact the District Superintendent or appropriate district staff to talk further about congregational sustainability.

If you marked 8 or more answers “No”, this may suggest a serious condition of decline for your congregation. With the assistance of district personnel, It is time to look courageously and honestly at your situation, and consider what options you have as a congregation.

Appendix B: Gary McIntosh Resource

One of the most difficult decisions for any church leader to make is when to close a church. Yet, it is estimated that a minimum of 1% of all protestant churches close each year in the United States. This means between 3,000 and 4,000 churches are closed annually.

What Churches Close?

In general terms the following four types of churches are ones that close.

1. New church plants that fail.

New churches are often at great risk. The first few years are the most crucial. As a rule of thumb if a new church makes it past the third year of existence it is likely to last at least 60+ years.

2. Churches that lose their vision.

The energy that drives a church into the future is a vision of what God has called the church to be and do. Churches that lose their sense of mission and purpose will struggle to justify their existence.

3. Churches with serious attendance loss.

A major loss of three-fourths or more of worship attendance is critical. When this factor is accompanied by other losses of vision, finances and effectiveness, a church has a very dim future.

4. Churches that become ineffective.

A basic generalization suggested by Lyle Schaller is that "the leading cause of death among churches is a deterioration of the capability to reach and to assimilate new members."

Key Indicators for Church Closure

A decision to close a church should never be made on the basis of any single indicator below but taken as a whole they can provide church leaders with helpful insights as to the future potential of a church.

- **Indicator #1: Public Worship Attendance**

A church needs at least 50 adults to have a public worship service that is celebrative and attractive to new people. 20 to 40 adults at worship puts a church in an unhealthy situation. Less than 20 adults is a strong indication the church should be closed.

- **Indicator #2: Total Giving Units**

It usually takes a minimum of 10 - 12 faithful giving units to provide for a full-time pastor. It takes another 10 - 12 units to provide for the ministry of a church in terms of supplies, advertising, etc. Thus, **a church reaches a danger point when it has 25 or less giving units.**

- **Indicator #3: Lay Leadership Pool**

As a rule of thumb, a church needs one leader for every 10 adult members (junior high and up), 1 leader for every 6 elementary children and 1 leader for every 2 children below school age. Less leadership than this will make it difficult to provide for the needs of a growth ministry.

- **Indicator #4: An Effective Ministry**

A church needs at least one ministry for which it is known in the community. For example, some churches may be known as the church with the great Sunday school, others for their children's program. Still others may be known for their ministry to senior citizens.

- **Indicator #5: Past Growth Rate**

A growth rate that has been declining for 5 to 10 years should serve as a warning signal. If a church is only about one-fourth or less of its original size it is likely to be facing hard times which may result in eventual closure.

- **Indicator #6: Congregation's Spiritual Health**

A church's spiritual climate is another factor to be considered. Is a church characterized as one of peace, happiness, and love? Or, is it found to be one of anger, bitterness and discouragement?

- **Indicator #7: Average Membership Tenure**

How long have people been attending church? If the average tenure is longer than 20 years, it is a sign that a church is having difficulty reaching and assimilating new people.

- **Indicator #8: Focus of Church Goals**

Is the focus of a church on itself or outward to new people? Do leaders talk about ministry, mission and purpose? Or, do they talk about paying the bills, hanging on, real estate, the past and membership care?

- **Indicator #9: Budget Expenditures**

Where is the money spent? Is it spent on outreach, advertising and ministry? Or, are these areas the first to be cut when the budget gets tight?

- **Indicator #10: Church Rumors**

Is there positive talk about God and His work in the church? Are there people who believe God can renew the church in the days ahead? Or, do people talk about the past, respond pessimistically to visionary statements and fail to recognize that God is at work in their church?

Evaluation

The following questionnaire is helpful if a church is deciding whether to continue:

Circle YES or NO for each question.

1. Does this church have an average public worship attendance of over 50 adults?
YES NO
2. Does this church have 25 faithful giving units?
YES NO
3. Does this church have at least one competent lay leader for every 10 adults?
YES NO
4. Does this church have at least one ministry for which it is known in the community?
YES NO
5. Does this church have a positive growth rate over the past 10 years?
YES NO
6. Does this church demonstrate a healthy spiritual life?
YES NO

7. Does this church have an average membership tenure of less than 20 years?
YES NO
8. Does this church talk about its future goals of ministry?
YES NO
9. Does this church actively spend 5% of its budget on outreach to the local community?
YES NO
10. Does this church have hope that God can renew its growth and vitality?
YES NO

Tally the YES answers.

7 - 10 YES answer is excellent!

This is a church with great potential.

4 - 8 YES answer is fair.

This is a church with unclear direction. It may grow or may decline.

1 - 3 YES answer is poor.

This is a church with a limited future.

Appendix C: A Checklist for Steps in Closing a Congregation

Records

1. Gather all records including:
 - Articles of incorporation, constitution, bylaws
 - Membership list
 - Minutes: congregation meetings and church board meetings
 - Property papers: titles and deeds
 - Insurance policies
 - Annual audit reports
 - Printed histories
 - Congregational directories
 - Audio and visual records including photographs, videotape, and films
2. In collaboration with District Resource Center personnel, determine which records to maintain and forward to the District Resource Center.
3. Dispose of records not needed.

Legal:

Personnel in the District Resource Center are very familiar with all the details that are part of the closure of a church from the church being declared “Inactive” (see Appendix D”) Close coordination with the District Resource Center is essential as a congregation moves through this process. These items merit careful attention:

1. Follow directions given in the Manual of the Church of the Nazarene regarding church closures.
2. If the church moves from “inactive” status to “disorganization” status, take appropriate steps to deal with legal requirements, state incorporation filings, officers of the corporation, etc.
3. File dissolution form with Internal Revenue Service
4. . Collaborate with appropriate District Resource Center personnel to determine what records, legal documents, etc. should be transferred to the District Resource Center.

Membership

Arrange for transfer of membership for all members as possible.

Pastor

1. Finalize payments to pastor
2. Determine whether the pastor will be “unassigned” with the closure of the church.

Property

1. Inventory the contents of the building(s).
2. Arrange to secure the building(s) until ownership is transferred.
3. Designate person to check building regularly
4. Discontinue utility services no longer needed.
5. Arrange for the exterior of the property to be maintained (lawn mowing, weed control, etc.)
6. Decide what to do with the contents and with the building(s).

Financial

1. Catalog all financial accounts.
2. Arrange for bills to be paid promptly until closing is finalized. Assistance is available through the District Resource Center.
3. Coordinate with the District Resource Center to determine how any remaining funds should be handled.

Appendix D: Pertinent paragraphs related to church closures from The Manual of the Church of the Nazarene, 2017-2021

106. Declaring Churches Inactive or Disorganized. Churches may be declared inactive for a period of transition by action of the District Advisory Board prior to being officially disorganized, reactivated or reorganized.

106.1. A local church may be disorganized as follows:

1. Recommendation from the District Superintendent;
2. Affirmative response from the General Superintendent in jurisdiction; and,
3. A two-thirds vote of the District Advisory Board.

106.2. In case a local church becomes inactive or disorganized, or in the event of withdrawal or attempted withdrawal from the Church of the Nazarene (as certified by the District Advisory Board), any church property that may exist may in no way be diverted to other purposes, but title shall pass to the District Advisory Board acting as agent for said district where such has been incorporated, or other authorized agents, for the use of the Church of the Nazarene at large, as the district assembly shall direct. Local church trustees holding property for the inactive or disorganized church shall sell or dispose of the same only on the order and under the direction of the District Advisory Board or other appointed agent of the district assembly, with the written approval of the General Superintendent in jurisdiction; either conveying said property or delivering the proceeds from the sale thereof as directed by the district assembly or its District Advisory Board. (104.4, 106, 225.23)

106.3. No trustee or trustees of an inactive or disorganized church, or a church that withdraws or attempts to withdraw from the Church of the Nazarene, may divert property from the use of the Church of the Nazarene. (104.4, 141-144, 225.23)

106.4. Only officially disorganized churches may be dropped from the records of the General Secretary.

106.5. When a local church has been declared inactive, the signatories on all church monetary and/or security accounts must transfer the proceeds of the same to the District Advisory Board for deposit. Refusal to comply authorizes the District Advisory Board by resolution to close all accounts and assume jurisdiction of all assets where the law allows.

Appendix E: Options for Churches When Facing Issues of Survival

1. **Replant:** A decision to close an existing church and re-launch as a new church, with new leadership (pastor), new name, new identity, interim governance, new ministry approach and overall new philosophy of ministry. In some cases it is not necessary to adopt a new name but simply adjust it. In some instances where a denominational label is a hindrance to reaching the community or where the name is unnecessarily long or confusing a name change may be appropriate.
 - Builds on the history/legacy of the previous Church
 - Requires new leadership (assessed and approved replant pastor)
 - New decision-making structure and new decision makers who handle the daily decisions.
 - Offers a break with the past (end date) and a fresh start for the future (launch date)
Historical factors may linger among those who were part of the previous church.
 - Resource hungry: salary for Restart pastor, money for redecorating, facility upgrades, rebranding, need for new congregants, volunteers and staff.
 - New identity can create momentum and enthusiasm and interest in the community. This is the most drastic approach and is often rejected or not entertained by existing churches. In some circumstances the District Resource Center may need to intervene through the “Church in Crisis” or “Declaring a Church Inactive” provisions.
 - May be eligible for funding from the District Resource Center regarding pastor’s salary/benefits and facility upgrades.
2. **Restart:** This is the scenario in which the existing church surrenders assets, including property and day-to-day decision making to the District Resource Center. Action taken, depending on the circumstances, may be either the “Church in Crisis” provision, (Manual Paragraph 125, 125.1) or the “Declaring Churches Inactive” provision (Manual paragraph 106-106.5). In either case, a Leadership Team will be named by the District Superintendent, in coordination with other responsible District Resource Center staff personnel and the Mission Development Board. An assessed and qualified replant pastor will be appointed, leading the church to launch as a new congregation. Under certain circumstances the decision to enter into the Restart process may be submitted to the congregation for a congregational vote.

In situations where such action is warranted, the church will be officially closed for a period of time to allow for planning and execution toward the Restart or Replanting of the church. The district may determine that investing financially in the building/property must happen as part of the Restart.

3. **Merger/Marriage:** The joining together of an existing unhealthy or declining church and a healthy existing church or church plant.
 - Two churches coming together to form one new church.
 - The healthy church takes the lead position
 - The unhealthy church gives up assets, control and decision-making.
 - Requires lengthy process meetings and clear communication as the specifics of the merger are developed, and addressed, and agreed upon.
 - Legal consultation is required as one church closes and ceases to exist and assets are transferred to the other church
 - Can be a blessing to both churches with increased members and a greater number of volunteers
 - Requires caution as some may develop an “us” and “them” posture toward one another
 - Often requires the assistance of an outside third party to facilitate discussion and decision-making between the two congregations
4. **Campus/Adoption:** The adoption or absorption of an existing church in decline or near death by a larger healthy church.
 - The adopted church gives up all control and assets to the adopting church
 - New leadership replaces existing leadership
 - Results in immediate growth numerically
 - Typically yields abundant resources for facilities and ministry
 - Most often results in a loss of historical identity and legacy
 - Strength of recognized “brand” in community
 - Much lower risk than revitalization, replanting and merger
 - Existing church members have option of becoming members of the adopting church
5. **The PAC (Parent Affiliated Congregation):** Created to address the needs of churches beginning creative new congregations who had no way of reporting those new works. Ethnic congregations, organic churches and multi-sites are notable examples. If these affiliated congregations are not registered, they do not receive literature, are not identified via official channels and do not appear in any database and thus are “off the grid” and unidentifiable for collaborative efforts, networking and mutual encouragement.
6. **Closure of Church/Disposition of Property:** The existing church closes, and deeds assets and property are transferred to the District Resource Center under the supervision of the District Advisory Board as provided for in the Nazarene Manual.
 - Last option of final resort
 - Least desirable, since this option fails to build upon the history and legacy of pre-existing church
 - Easiest approach
 - Administratively burdensome on the entity receiving the assets and property