

REDISCOVERING OUR SPIRITUAL DNA

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Doctor of Ministry

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I dedicate this to the memory of the following individuals that are special to me and will always remain in my heart;

First to my father Mr. James E. Murphy – Pop you have always been there every step of the way in all I have accomplished

To my very first pastor Rev Dr. Hylton L. James who shared with me on many occasions that I was going to preach the gospel

Rev. Wilbert C. Wilks who licensed me to preach and started my training in ministry

Rev. James O. Bradford my pastor in Oklahoma City OK who helped me sharpening my skills in ministry

Lastly Dr. Christopher Hammond who taught me how to listen and learn from the stories

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## Acknowledgement

“In everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you”

This task has been an incredible journey and I couldn't make it without the help of our Lord and many of you.

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I want to thank the officers and members Mt. Moriah Missionary Baptist Church who gave me the chance to pastor. Mt. Moriah was my first pastorate and you never forget your first.

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## ABSTRACT

Our Spiritual DNA reveals your spiritual identity as that which makes you, including your spiritual strengths, your spiritual gifts, your spiritual passions and your spiritual call. A member of the church had expressed the church was dying with this in mind we began to study the Spiritual DNA of the church as a whole and ourselves as individuals.

Ethnography was a tool that was used to teach us to listen to the stories and narratives that were delivered by the congregation to help identify us spiritually. This method helps show us that we all have a lot of embedded theology with in us. Embedded theology is about our understanding of faith from many encounters with our Christianity. Many of the things that we do in church such as worship, pray, sit and sing are all accomplished from what have been taught since we were children. This method helps us with our Deliberation Theology. This is the process of reflecting on multiple understanding of our faith implicit in the life and witness of Christians in order to identify and/or develop the most adequate understanding possible. It makes us realize to the fact that even though we are Christians, we are theologians. Discovering our spiritual DNA made us really look inside ourselves and noticed that we all have different gifts but we all have a great deal to give. This thought pattern was put to the test when the church organized their 150th church celebration. We notice that the church that one thought was dying still had plenty of life.

## Chapter 1

### Narrative of Opportunity

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way - in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.<sup>1</sup>

Charles Dickens

Charles Dickens' quote best describe the mood within the church I serve. Mt. Moriah has had some good times and some bad times throughout its long history. During the sessions that the lay committee and I had, we shared many stories which really brought this quote to light.

As an example, one evening as I was speaking with the members of the lay committee about the church I began by sharing with them my ideas for a church project. During the course of the conversation, I offered my observations about our church both the best and the worse. After sharing these observations, the committee told stories and made the following statements:

“The church is dying.”

“The church is beginning to lack in spirituality.”

“It seems that all we do is come to church and then we go home.”

“I am starting to feel discouraged because the people don't show any initiative about anything.”

“There is something missing in the way the church is operating spiritually.”

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1999).

“The members are not as committed to the church as they should be.”

We discussed the statement that the church never dies but it does change, a theme I shared from a Doctor of Ministry colleague. Two different viewpoints emerged:

- The church can die if we understand the church to be the building or denomination.
- If the church doors close for good because of bankruptcy, failing membership or changes in the denomination policy/procedures then the church can die because the notion of church is not focused on Christ.
- The church as or is the body of Christ and therefore the church can never die.
- If the actual church doors close the church is still alive because the focus is on the body of Christ and not on the building.

In the conversation with a fellow Doctor of Ministry classmate, he stated, “The church never dies but it does change.<sup>2</sup>” Later, when I shared this with the church members we agreed that the church does change because society and generations change. The challenge of change however is often the challenge of understanding the purpose of change and how such change may be of God. One example we agreed upon was that Church worship styles have changed from what it was like in the earlier years.

As I reflect on these conversations I have identified several areas of opportunity:

- to engage in conversation; to explore where we bond spiritually and define our notion of church.

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<sup>2</sup> Arron Bowens, interviewed by author, October 12, 2011



- to use the stories and ideas from the conversational dialogue with the members of the church to evaluate our shared ministry. This could result in a sermon or teaching series on leadership, evangelism, or a better understanding of the notion of church.
- to redefine and strengthen the role of pastoral leadership. Since this is my first pastorate, I can establish myself to meet or exceed the expectations of the congregational notion of what a church leader should be.
- to explore and establish new ministries that will benefit the people of God in this church and in the community. This would be an opportunity to show what type of leader I can be and also define how true leadership can be effective in the church.
- to restore the feeling of life into the church. The congregation could become empowered to *do* ministry. They would be able to take charge in helping to restore, strengthen, and become more visible in their neighborhood.

In the course of conversing with some of the members in the church, I learned about past narratives which can serve to give new life. The members shared memories about events or programs that had happened during the life of the church. The church has been involved in many different types of ministries since its beginning. As they shared their history, I began to see what could be the focus of my Doctor of Ministry Project. I began to look at the church and its history as spiritual DNA. In seeing who we are will help us reclaim not only who we are now and what we are called to so that change is not the enemy but rather a catalyst for transformation.

I identify Spiritual DNA as that which maintains the strength and vitality of the Body of Christ. Spiritual DNA is the pattern of kingdom life, from the smallest unit (the disciple in relationship to Jesus and others) to the largest unit (a family or movement of churches). Ministry Insights provides the following description of understanding DNA and Spiritual DNA.

Below I quote at length from the website Ministry Insights.<sup>3</sup>

A **clinical DNA test** determines your body identity at the cellular level, establishing paternity, genetic disorders, and ancestry. It is even used as a reliable identity device in crime scene investigations.

A **spiritual DNA assessment** reveals your spiritual identity as that which makes you, including: your spiritual strengths, your spiritual gifts, your spiritual passions, and your spiritual call.

The two assessments are similar in that they both return tangible data. But they differ considerably in at least one respect: who runs the tests. A clinical DNA test is ordered by a medical or investigative professional and must be conducted by a lab technician. Your spiritual assessment can only be undertaken by you – when you decide to do so.”

I am choosing to use the Ministry Insight material as the core of my project in order to begin to assess the strengths and unique opportunity of the church, its leadership and my place as pastor within this context. Below I list the key elements which inform a spiritual DNA assessment as presented by Ministry Insights. I quote the material verbatim because

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<sup>3</sup> “Your Spiritual DNA, Part 1,” accessed December 11, 2015, <http://ministryinsights.com>.

it best represents my own views and is consistent with the theological and views of the church I serve. I use this material to reshape the narrative, and to remind the church of its strong roots, now framed as DNA; my hope is to reclaim the story of faith and purpose.

### **The Key Elements for Healthy Church DNA**

“The DNA of the church can be simplified to three things, namely, divine truth, nurturing relationships, and apostolic mission. They are needed in every part of the church, from its smallest unit to its largest.

- *Divine Truth.* Truth comes from God. It is the revelation of God to humankind. This comes from the Son, the Spirit, and the Scriptures. The Son (Jesus) is both God and human and came to reveal to us in his person what God is like and what God requires. The Scriptures were authored by God and reveal God’s unfolding plan for humanity. The Spirit of God is also Divine Truth, since he brings revelation and direction to believers.

- *Nurturing Relationships.* Humans were never created to be alone. We are social creatures and have an intrinsic need for relationships. Our relational orientation is a reflection of the image of God in us. God Himself is relational and exists in a community—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is love because God is relational. To the Christian, God is love because he has always existed in relationship. Is love possible without someone to love? This should be the defining characteristic of our faith. All men should know that we are Christ’s disciples by the love that we have for one another.

- *Apostolic Mission.* Apostolic means that someone is sent as a representative with a message. We are here for a purpose. We have been given a prime directive to

fulfill—to make disciples of all the nations. This part of us also comes from the nature of God. Jesus is an Apostle. He is the Chief Cornerstone of the apostolic foundation. Before he left this planet, he sent his disciples into the world with a mission.<sup>4</sup>

Reflecting on the DNA of Mt. Moriah Missionary Baptist Church has afforded me the opportunity to identify the history of the church and its community. The church is predominantly African-American and in 2013 celebrated its 150 Anniversary. The average age of the members is about 35 to 40 years of age and averages about 30 worshipers on Sunday morning. Many of the youth have graduated high school and are in college.

The Mt. Moriah Missionary Baptist Church Inc. was organized in 1863. After the Civil War a church was organized for black Baptists who were former members of the surrounding white churches. Separate churches sprang up everywhere, and among them was the Mt. Moriah Missionary Baptist Church. Even after blacks and whites organized in separate congregations, whites and blacks remained in the same associations but increasing pressures and self-determination led to the organization of independent Black associations throughout the nation in 1895. The Mt Moriah Missionary Baptist Church first worship service was held in an old barn where hay was stored in the loft. The Mt. Moriah Missionary Baptist Church was the mother church of other churches in the Cerro Gordo/Chadbourn area.

A new church was built in 1865 and was located about 1050 feet from the existing church. Right next to the new church was the segregated school children attended. The name of the road where the school was located, Casey Williams Road, is named after one of the church

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<sup>4</sup> Neil Cole, *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005).

deacons. The spot where the original church was built is where one of my trustees now resides and the spot where the old school was is now the address where my Administrative Assistant/Treasurer currently resides.

The church moved and was rebuilt again (in 1968) and this remains the current location. From 1968 to 1998 Mt. Moriah met two Sundays a month (the second and fourth Sundays). During that time there were not enough ministers to preach at many of the local churches exacerbated by the distance to travel between churches partly because many ministers did not have access to what we would consider modern transportation. The narrative of Mt. Moriah is one of adapting to change, of struggle, of claiming an identity and place.

In 1998 the church experienced culture shock brought about by the ministry and leadership of Rev. Matthews. Long-term church members describe these changes: Rev. Matthews introduced workshops, bible study and prayer meetings. He initiated regular worship every Sunday. Pastor Matthews was a take charge pastor and the members became used to this style of pastoral leadership. Another culture change was Rev. Matthews's acceptance of women in the preaching ministry. In North Carolina many churches did not accept women preachers in the pulpit. (Some pastors are still like this today.)

I'm grateful for the work that Pastor Matthews started and because of his leadership, I have been able to build on his foundational work. He had the church incorporated and provided a way for the church to have internet from dial-up. He also had a sound system put in place to record our services.

The Mt. Moriah Missionary Baptist church has been through the Civil War, The Great Depression, Segregation, Civil Rights, Riots, Desegregation, World War I and II, The

Korean Conflict, Vietnam, The Gulf War, and Iran and Iraq wars. 150 years of history says a lot for the Mt. Moriah Missionary Baptist Church Chadbourn, Inc. The struggles of our forefathers are truly appreciated. They were instrumental in preparing the way for us to have such a beautiful edifice today. And still, as the Mother Church for this area, it remains a beacon of light and hope leading the way to righteousness.

The cultural context of this church is predominantly African- American worshipers.

As of the census of 2000, there are 2,129 people, 877 households, and 548 families residing in the town. The population density is 311.4/km (805.3/mi). There are 983 housing units at an average density of 143.8/km (371.8/mi). The racial makeup of the town is 41.94% White, 53.55% African American, 1.93% Native American, 0.38% Asian, 0.05% Pacific Islander, 1.41% from other races, and 0.75% from two or more races. 1.97% of the population is Hispanic or Latino of any race. There are 877 households out of which 27.6% have children under the age of 18 living with them, 35.3% are married couples living together, 24.4% have a female householder with no husband present, and 37.5% are non-families. 33.6% of all households are made up of individuals and 14.3% have someone living alone who is 65 years of age or older.

The average household size is 2.42 and the average family size is 3.12. In the town the population is spread out with 28.4% under the age of 18, 9.0% from 18 to 24, 24.7% from 25 to 44, 22.5% from 45 to 64, and 15.4% who are 65 years of age or older. The median age is 36 years. For every 100 females there are 84.5 males. For every 100 females age 18 and over, there are 72.5 males. The median income for a

household in the town is \$24,539, and the median income for a family is \$30,574. Males have a median income of \$23,804 versus \$20,270 for females.

The per capita income for the town is \$12,290. 31.4% of the population and 24.3% of families are below the poverty line. Out of the total population, 45.5% of those under the age of 18 and 25.6% of those 65 and older are living below the poverty line.<sup>5</sup>

After looking at these demographics I made two observations about the congregation. First, some of the members of the church are on a fixed income such as retirement, disability or social security. Second, the most common employment is in healthcare, state employment, or the transportation industry. Sharing this data with the leadership is an opportunity to reclaim the story of the church's mission and its own spiritual DNA so that old and new opportunities for ministry in this church are possible.

As Mt. Moriah begins to rediscover or understand their spiritual DNA, they will better understand themselves and their importance to ministry. Once this is recognized the joy will be restored. The reason the joy will be restored is the focus will not be on themselves but on Christ. It must be understood that in order to show spiritual joy, Christ must be present. The ministry goes beyond the walls that surrounds us. Spiritual DNA will help us learn that the church is in us. The presence of the Holy Spirit lives within us. It is my view that when we know this then those that come in contact with us will not only know it but also see it in our words and actions. A song we sing gives witness: there's something on the inside working on the outside. Another song is the Jesus in me loves the Jesus in you.

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<sup>5</sup> Town of Chadbourn NC accessed November 19, 2015, <http://www.townofchabourn.com>.

Ecclesiology as the study of the church, is essential for all Christians as it guides us toward a biblical understanding of how Christians relate to one another, to God, and to unbelievers. A firm understanding of ecclesiology benefits us personally as we learn how to help provide healthy church growth and honor God. As a church pastor it's my responsibility to explain how important our roles are when it comes to the church. Before I can do this I have to first understand my own spiritual DNA and I need to define my leadership role.

Defining my spiritual DNA allows me to have a grip on what I believe the scriptures are saying when it comes to Christ and the Church. I understand that this is a daily practice. Secondly before I really identify my leadership role I need to view myself from the pew. In other words, I had to sit where they (church members and leaders) sit. Do I view myself the same way the congregation views me? I will explore this question in Chapter Two.



## Chapter 2

### Theological Reflection

“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called; with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”<sup>6</sup>

I was told when I started pastoring, the church normally follows the characteristics of its leader. In listening to the stories of the congregation, an emphasis was placed on the leadership, both past and present. When I was questioned on leadership, I received this response, “If the pastor is one who is focused on church discipline, (on-time for service, giving or study, etc.) the congregation will follow suit.”<sup>7</sup> It is clear to me, the Mt. Moriah congregation considers this response as leading by example.

Leadership in any capacity of an organization is vital. The success or failure of an organization, church or team is normally attributed to the person who is in-charge. As an example I love watching and playing sports with a passion. What I notice is that the most successful team always has a strong leader directing the team. Once the leader has

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<sup>6</sup> Eph 4:1-3 (New Kings James Version)

<sup>7</sup> Treasurer Mt. Moriah Missionary Baptist Church.

established him or herself, the team can if it chooses to dictate the direction the team is going. If there is strong leadership the team has a winning attitude but if there is weak leadership the team will fail in obtaining their goal.

When the statement was mentioned about leadership, I had to first understand what type of leadership style would best fit Mt. Moriah and if my leadership skills are a match. It may be that a variety of skills are necessary in this circumstance. Bishop T. D. Jakes

characterizes several different leadership styles:

Autocratic Style – tends towards the propensity of making decisions independent of input. These leaders already know what they want to do. They are not easily deterred by the opinions of others and provide a predictable kind of security by their sovereignty.

Chaotic Style – brings the team together and empowers them to resolve conflict while distancing themselves from the issue at hand. These leaders instinctively bring the right people together but don't always know how to focus their abilities.

Democratic style - Instinctively presides based on the majority's opinion. This leader puts issues to a vote and feels comforted by the decision being based on the will of the team.

Laissez-faire style – Leaders serve as mentors and have great motivational skills. This style instinctively inspires the team toward excellence but often leads to a perception that such leaders detach themselves from the actual decision-making process.

Persuasive style – Makes the decision but will spend a great deal of time convincing and persuading the team that what they have already decided is the

best route to take.”<sup>8</sup>

When I looked at these different types of leadership styles, I had to figure out which was more me and the best leadership style to lead this church. Through this process, I have discovered that to successfully lead, at times, I must incorporate more than one style to have a successful ministry. Further reflection through scripture, grounds my view of leadership as a necessary function both for pastors and congregation. Therefore, my goal is to develop the skills to discern what style may be necessary in each situation. That is, I will work to adapt my style in order to facilitate change.

In the book of Revelation Jesus is talking with the angel of the church as Sardis. “I know your deeds. I know your deeds and our reputation of being alive but you are dead...wake up and strengthen what remains and what is about to die.”<sup>9</sup> The church at Sardis wasn't completely dead. I compare this to Mt. Moriah. Perhaps Mt Moriah, like Sardis, has some spark left in them but their deeds were not complete. The Lord was not pleased with everything that they were doing. When my trustee said that she felt that the church was dying I thought of this passage of scripture. Jesus is saying to them to “Wake Up” these may be the same words he is saying to us at our church. My concern is if we do not wake up the devil will devour us completely, therefore we need to strengthen what remains and might be about to die. The members or the church need to strengthen what remains of the spiritual life in the church. Rediscovering the joy that Mt. Moriah felt that it has lost, to rekindle the joy again, we must discover our own individual spiritual DNA. To discover

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<sup>8</sup> T. D. Jakes, *Instinct: The Power to Unleash Your Inborn Drive* (New York: Faith Words, 2014), 177-178.

<sup>9</sup> Rev. 3:1-2. (King James Version)

this, Mt. Moriah may need to consider these primary reflections. I note several of them below.

### **I. Reflection on the name Mt. Moriah**

Why was this particular name selected for the church and what does the Mt. Moriah name mean and say about our church. In a sermon by Pastor Robert Cornwall entitled “What's in a Name? -- Reclaiming a Founding Vision Sermon” he talks about the name of the church. This carefully selected naming of the church is part of its DNA because when we look at ourselves our name means a great deal. “Our names reflect the eras in which we were born, our family heritage, and even our cultural climate. Some names endure and others don't,” said Cornwall. I recall watching an ESPN interview of Jerome Bettis, Hall a Fame running back from the Pittsburgh Steelers. During the interview Mr. Bettis stated that his father shared with him that of all he sets out to accomplish, in all that he sets out to do during his college years and in the NFL, don't damage the Bettis name. He continues to state that his father didn't have much, the only thing he had left was his name and that meant something to him. I can recall in my personal life my family wanted to be proud of my name. In my view, our name identifies who we are.

In Genesis 17, the story of God's covenant with Abraham and Sarah. God changes their names to reflect the deep change in identity, place of belonging and home. In Genesis 12, God tells the couple to leave their home for a new land. In Genesis 17, they have arrived at the new home. So, their status changes from nomad to permanent residents. God promises that they will be the ancestors of many nations, instead of being a blessing to the nations.

This change reflects the changing circumstances they found themselves in, but perhaps there is a word of wisdom for Mt Moriah Church in these stories. Perhaps that word is this

– God is present with us especially in reclaiming an identity and stepping out to honor and live into that identity, past, present and future. In all situations, we are called to be a blessing. These are the words of challenge to the congregation that come from the sermon of Robert Cornwall.

Mt. Moriah is the name given to a mountain range, mentioned in the biblical text.

Traditionally Moriah has been interpreted as the name of the specific mountain at which the sacrifice of Isaac took place. As is often the case in the biblical text, place is significant

. My question for Mt Moriah Church: How does our heritage influence who we are spiritually? As was asked by Robert Cornwall: “With that in mind, how does the name of this congregation reflect our congregational spiritual DNA?”<sup>10</sup>

In summary, the section above quotes liberally from Robert Cornwall’s sermon and credit is due for the theological depth he provides in the midst of this project.

## **II. Reflection on Unwillingness to Initiate**

My question is this: There are members in the church who do work hard but have become discouraged by the few who seemingly do not want to do anything but complain about everything. As a pastoral leader, what is my role in helping to foster change.

Thomas Ranier in his book the *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* he demonstrated that one reason a church may be dying is because either we don’t recognized the change socioeconomically or we see but choose to not do anything about.<sup>11</sup> I have noticed a couple

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10 Robert Cornwall, “What’s in a Name? -- Reclaiming a Founding Vision Sermon,” February 23, 2014, accessed September 15, 2015, <http://www.bobcornwall.com>

11 Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* (Nashville: B&H Books, 2014).

of things about Mt. Moriah and the Chadbourn, North Carolina area. Chadbourn, North Carolina is a rural area. There are not many jobs. When the young people graduate from high school many of them leave the area for college and normally do not return to the area to live. Most of them either find careers in the bigger cities or join the military.

I have noticed that Mt. Moriah has not adapted to the change brought about by the loss of the next generation in the church as attenders or leaders. The young people who remain in the area do not relate to the present style of the worship service. This creates a climate where joy is difficult to find or experience. In order to bring joy back into Mt. Moriah spiritual experience, Mt. Moriah has to feel that they are empowered to do work in the church—both young and old. There is nothing wrong with the ministries at the church it's just that the workers are few. In saying this as the pastor I must empower them to do the work of ministry. I must not only put people in charge of church ministries and programs, I must allow them to bring their ideas on how to strengthen their participation in ministry and at the same time how to make it effective in the wider community.

### **III. Reflection on Unwillingness to Commit**

The members of the church see lack of progress with the ministries currently in place but they do not want to step out and work. I have had several meetings with members and several conversations in which they have admitted they are not committed to the work of the church. Even though some feel that all they do is come to church and then go home. In reality I believe many are satisfied with this. I have preached about commitment and have said that I'm committed to the ministry at this church but I can't do it alone.

One of the issues I believe Mt. Moriah faces is the difficulty of adapting to change. Under any circumstances, adapting to change is not easy. Generations and society are changing but to keep up the spiritual vitality that joy offers, change does have to occur.

Jesus shares a story about putting new wine in old wineskins. I have discovered that one of the main reasons the church is not prospering/growing the way it could is the difficulty of accepting change in the church. Many find it difficult to adapt to a new focus of ministry. There are many examples: many churches no longer sing hymns from the hymnal using instead a more contemporary style of music. Some churches have gone from the traditional style of deacon devotion during the start of worship to praise teams. Growing up I can remember when there were choir processions but now they just go straight into the choir loft. Generational shifts in technology mean people no longer pick up bibles from the pews to follow scripture instead they open apps from their cellphones, Ipads or tablets to get and read scripture. All of these examples relate to Mt Moriah.

#### **IV. Reflection on the need to revive the ministry at Mt. Moriah**

Psalms 85:6 the Psalmist raises this question “Will thou revive us again?”<sup>12</sup> Yes! Mt Moriah can be revived though I believe the revival depends on a willingness to change. The Sons of Korah recognized that God has been favorable to them. God has brought them out of captivity, forgiven their sins, taken away his wrath but in all this they still needed to be revived. This is the same way with the Mt. Moriah now. Mt. Moriah has recognized that God has been blessing them and that God is a forgiver of sins but yet they are still in need of revival. Mt. Moriah needs to be spiritually revived because they are burdened down and feel spiritually dead. They need to be revived because there are some who used to shine

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<sup>12</sup> Psalms 85:6 (King James Version)

but now are spoiled, who used to be spirit-filled but feel spiritless, who used to serve but now sit and some who used to sing but are now without song. In order to get the zeal back into the worship service and to revive individual spirituality, I believe the church and its members must begin with the experience of new ideas in worship and bible study.

Matthew 28: 19-20 gives me mandate to Go ye therefore and make disciples. In order to do this the pastor must continue to teach and preach the word of God. The church's mission statement is: Teach, Equip and Empower disciples for ministry. The mandate does not end there but continues and includes Acts chapter 1. Jesus tells his disciples to remain there-- not to depart Jerusalem --but wait for the promise of the Father. We are told John truly baptized with water but you shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. In verse 8 Jesus tells them you shall receive power after that the Holy ghost is come upon you and shall be witness unto me in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth. This is a message for Mt. Moriah as part of its spiritual DNA.

I believe that once Mt. Moriah is spiritually strengthened by what they already have as their DNA, people will feel empowered and committed, and be able to see themselves becoming more involved in the work of the church, Mt. Moriah will began to see the same joy that the church felt on the day of Pentecost after the Holy Ghost fell upon them. My hope is that we will dream from the results of past revivals in hope that we will be able to dream again. The hymn writer pens these words "Give me that old time religion; give me that old time religion, it's good enough for me." Stand by the roads, and look and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it. And find rest for your souls.<sup>13</sup>

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13 Jeremiah 6:16 (King James Version)



In summary, spiritual DNA for Mt Moriah is a reclamation project, imbued by the Holy Spirit. Cultural context does matter, and change is inevitable. I am suggesting that change is perhaps God's move in the church and the wider culture, calling us to trust more, depend less on the past, while living joyfully and faithfully to that which we are called.

## Chapter 3

### Project 150<sup>th</sup> Church Celebration

“Weeping may endure for a night but Joy cometh in the morning”<sup>14</sup>

This chapter outlines the project implemented to integrate theology and practice; to make real the opportunity to grasp a longtime spiritual identity embodied in the community of faith. I have identified this as part of our DNA of Mt. Moriah from its beginning. Guest preacher Robert Cornwall provided the right questions in order to stir us to think anew so that we are able to understand that spiritual joy anchors who we are, what we have been through, and how we participate in a changing future. At the core, I claim that we are led by and in Christ.

After listening to the small group that had assembled when this journey started and listening to their answers about no joy or their feeling on why the church is dying, I began praying and thinking on what it would take to restore the joy that Mt Moriah felt was

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<sup>14</sup> Psalms 30:5

missing. There are three areas that need to be addressed for this project: ownership, fellowship and our mission.

One afternoon after Sunday morning worship the answer came. The person, who originally came to me and felt that the church was dying, had an incredible idea. We need to plan some type of fun day in celebration for our 150<sup>th</sup> Church Anniversary. The idea: Let's rearrange our church anniversary on our church calendar next year to coincide with our annual home-coming. I thought about this idea and felt that we should go with the idea because we need something to help spark life into the congregation. Mt. Moriah celebrates the church's anniversary in April and home-coming in August. This was a unique idea because bringing the two special days together involved the home comers, former church members and the community at large together in celebration. The first thing that I did was add this to our agenda for our annual church meeting in December 2011. When this was first presented it was met with both acceptance and some opposition. The weekend that this event was to take place is that same weekend that one of the families that make up our congregation hosts their annual family reunion. It was explained that this was only a onetime event and instead of the family meeting somewhere else to grill and do other events they were invited to come to the church and set up grills to cook out and partake in the Saturday festivities. Most of the members of that family were former members of the church. This would be exciting for them as well plus saving them money in the process.

The first thing we wanted to recognize is that event was a year out and we are not overlooking the importance of the 149<sup>th</sup> year of our church in April which was quickly approaching. It was explained that we want to change our Church anniversary from April to August in 2013 for only this one-time event. After some deliberation the members of

Mt. Moriah accepted the idea. This was exciting to me because one of the comments made from the group was how festive homecoming was in the past. People from everywhere would come and members from other churches would be involved. It was a celebration that would be talked about always. In observing this process, I started to see a glimpse of life as most of the members were getting excited.

### **Strategy**

The first thing that had to be done was to form the church celebration committee and develop a plan, including a strong committee who would take leadership roles. I have noticed in past experiences that when a person takes ownership of a task that individual takes pride in the task and works on it with great care. I drew from my work as a student at Webster University studying Human Resource Management about the stages of group development by Bruce Tuckman. I followed this strategy in developing the project for the event being planned. These stages of group development include:

- 1. Forming:** The group comes together and gets to initially know one other and form as a group.
- 2. Storming:** A chaotic vying for leadership and trialing of group processes
- 3. Norming:** Eventually agreement is reached on how the group operates (norming)
- 4. Performing:** The group practices its craft and becomes effective in meeting its objectives.
- 5. Adjourning:** The process of "unforming" the group, that is, letting go of the group structure and moving on.

Keeping this mind, I did something different. The person that suggested the idea was one of our trustees. She asked me if I wanted to pick the committee members. I started to say yes but I changed my mind and let her lead by asking her to chair the committee, giving her ownership. I tested another theory. I have noticed in the church that when a person is given ownership of a task or a project they not only do well with it, the byproduct also builds self-esteem. She accepted the task and began selecting her committee. While selecting her committee she did something strange she picked a person that she didn't get along with in the past and made her co-chairperson. I thought to myself joy is starting to show-up- but my original thought was problems in the making. Then she began selecting others from the congregation to work with her. She did not form a large committee but enough to get the job done. The one flaw to me was that she did not pick a young person to work on the committee. The forming stage was complete and the storming was not a problem because she knew who to bring together to get work done and what tasks can be assigned to whom so that they are able to complete the work.

### **Brainstorming**

The next task at hand was to assemble together to brainstorm ideas to make this a success. It was already decided during the annual church meeting to move our church anniversary to the fourth Sunday of August in 2013, the same day as the annual homecoming. During the discussion was the fun day. This day was very important to make the project successful. This was the day full of fun and events on Saturday the day before. On this day they had suggested to have as many people who wanted to bring their grills and have as possible cook off, three on three basketball tournaments, bouncers, popcorn machine. The

committee discussed designing tee-shirts and a souvenir booklet with ads and letters from different churches, family, friends and other organizations. They suggested when to start advertising this celebration in the newspaper, radio and members of the congregations to begin calling, emailing, twitter, and Facebook, etc.

We also discussed about the program for that Sunday and all that would be involved.

Even though it was our church celebration it was designated that the Sunday morning service as home coming and the Sunday afternoon service as church anniversary.

Normally the pastor would give the homecoming message but as I look at the history of Mt Moriah, it only had been served by 11 pastors in its 150<sup>th</sup> history. Mt Moriah has only three of us still living. I thought to make this celebration more eventful is to allow me to have our former two pastors deliver the morning and afternoon respectfully. This was accepted by the group. The project was moving smoothly. After all the brainstorming the program and planning was presented to the church for approval. After a lengthy discussion from who was going to do what and the colors of the program and tee –shirts, the cost and what was expected of us the committee report was accepted and approved by the church congregation. The norming stage is completed.

### **Planning**

After the committee was formed, the brainstorming of ideas completed, it was time to put the plan into effect. Checklists were developed to ensure each thread would intertwine to make one perfect picture. Some had the task of designing, ordering tee shirts and collecting orders and money from those who wanted to purchase tee shirts. The same process was followed with the souvenir booklets. Someone was tasked to call the different vendors to have the bouncers and popcorn machine. To motivate the entire church to be

involved, they were asked to go out into the communities and to their families to advertise this great event that was going to take place. The congregation and the committee for the kitchen was tasked to plan the menu and order food for Sunday. Like all great plans there were some setbacks and detours but overall the plan worked. During both the planning and implementation phase, I thought about some of the comments made as stories that were shared. One of the times that the church felt great joy was when the people and leaders were working together for a common goal. These conversations were spoken by some of the older members in the church. Quarterly meetings were setup to make sure that this well-oiled machine was moving. During this stage the church was working together even in the midst of some opposition. A church that is working together is a happy church. The committee chairperson even assigned me a task. I had to contact the two former pastors and scheduled them for the service that they were going to preach. I thought that this would be an easy task but both pastors are currently pastoring other churches since leaving Mt Moriah. I had to make sure that letters of invitations were sent to them and then remind them just in case something changed. I also had to have a plan B if for some reason one could not attend or there was a last minute cancellation. In this seeming simple task of organizing and planning, of invitation and welcome, the people of Mt Moriah were fellowshiping together and I began to see and experience the resurrection of life.



### **Implementation**

After a year of planning, praying and overcoming obstacles the moment arrived.

Everything came together. Saturday morning was the fun day. People came. The Church property was full. There were people that had not seen each other in years. Stories from the past brought joy and perhaps an opportunity to reconnect. Singing and fun: the church that was considered to be dying now had life. In the hospital when a patient's vitals start dropping to a certain point the nurse immediately calls out a code blue. When a code blue is sounded medical staff rush in and perform CPR and/or shock the patient to bring them back to life.

The two-day celebration was much more than a weekend event. Committing to a common goal provided opportunity for substantive leadership among church members, a welcoming presence reunited not only memories and stories to share, but relationships. This is what is seemed like that weekend. The church was dying and a code blue went out in the form of



church celebration weekend and the stories and the joyous atmosphere shocked the church back to life.

The main goals of this project was to show that through initiative and commitment of everyone working together that we can achieve great success also to bring joy and life into the church. The overall goal was that after this celebration was completed that it will lead into other projects that would take everyone working together. This project also help me understand and define my leadership role. The task wasn't given to one member and she took off with it. As the leader of the church I showed great confidence in her and even publicly rewarded her and her staff the she hand-picked.

## Chapter 4

### Divine Truth

How to reach the masses, men of every birth for an answer Jesus gave the key; and I if I be lifted up from the earth I'll draw all men unto me. Lift him up, lift him up until he speaks from eternity; and I if I be lifted up from the earth I'll draw men unto me.<sup>15</sup>

In this chapter, I will explore the following themes: understanding a notion of church with the idea that once we understand, we can rethink church. Finally, I conclude with developing an active and adaptive approach, challenging Mt Moriah to bring the church to the people in the surrounding community. This is the great challenge of change for the church, though I am clear that the primary core of faith and church is to recognize Christ as the center, the cross as the site of forgiveness and resurrection. Combining this theology provides a foundation so that I as a pastor am able to lead and to be led so that Mt Moriah will continue to serve this community and the world. Reclaiming a spiritual DNA is the first and most important step.

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<sup>15</sup> Johnson Oatman Jr "Lift Him Up"

On Sunday Morning the church was filled to capacity. Former choir members joined the choir to sing a couple a few selections. In between services dinner was served and the sharing of stories continued from Saturday “Fun Day”. The people who came from near and far joined together in fellowship. I went from table to table, listening and contributing to the stories being told. The church was alive, people sat together and laughed.

I was at awe as I witnessed a transformation. I began to think back to the stories that the lay members shared with me. This is what they may have meant: the church being alive in the past. But the main question on my mind was what do I need to do to keep this going? The church is alive now but will it be possible to have Mt. Moriah understand what must be done to keep it alive?

I chose to do an assessment, looking at the area where we worship, how we worship and of my leadership style and pastoral role and function. As previously mentioned, the church has become stagnate, holding on to tradition and routinized, coming to church every Sunday and then going home. Bible study and Sunday School is not increasing in attendance; we are not reaching the unchurched. However, what really caught my attention is that most of the people do not sit together. They scatter all over the sanctuary, men on one side and women on the other. After my own initial assessment, I concluded the following that reflects a more complete review of Mt. Moriah’s spiritual DNA:

### **First is our Notion of Church**

When I began to analyze at a new and perhaps deeper level, I started my research looking at church websites to discern their notion of church. Those I looked at had one theme in common: reaching the un-churched. I believe that this is still the common theme with

churches today. How do we reach those who don't come to church? How do we as the church bring the church to the people? Before this question can be answered for Mt. Moriah, they will need to understand how they define what their notion of church is. My reason for using the DNA insight material is precisely to discover both individually and as a congregation their spiritual DNA. For me, I firmly believe our spiritual DNA defines who we are and our relationship to Christ. Once we identified what that is then we can define our notion of church.

One of the things that I do to help motivate the people is the first Sunday of the year I give what I call my "State of the Church" address. In this address I give the theme for the year. For example, one theme is "Reaping the Blessings of Heaven". I have found that having a theme helps move people, giving them something to strive for by providing a vision. The world or society around us is constantly changing and because of this the church has to change to continue to minister effectively. Vision and a yearly theme is the means to connect faith with the reality of change.

I am concerned that people come to church to "get their praise on" but go out with no hope or personal conviction, or so it seems to me. One question I have as a result of this project is how do we develop and strength convictions? Theologically, I believe one of our duties is to lead people to the cross where convictions are born, nurtured and sustained. With this conviction and foundation, I am free to challenge the church to rethink church, both literally and figuratively.

### **Rethink Church**

I mention that the church has become stagnate and too tied to tradition. I raised this question with some of my church members "Do you think that our church is very

traditional?” One person stated that it depends on how the church is compared to other churches in the community. In this she didn’t think that our church is traditional because there some churches who still do and believe how church should be the same way it was 40 plus years ago. For example, many still don’t believe in women preaching, becoming deacons or becoming pastors of a church. There are some who still worship the same way as they did years before. We still have many churches that still meet two Sundays out of the month and will not change from that format. Yet, they are still wondering why they do not experience church growth. There are some that are not able to accept new ideas. When I look at the answers maybe our church is not as traditional as I thought. As an example, we have women preachers and women in leadership positions but we are still worshipping the same way.

### **Change in Approach to Ministry to the Goal**

I’m trying to change how we do church not in the sense of changing the interpretation of the word of God but our approach to ministry. Many of the people who come to church now want to get more out of worship services than just singing, praying clapping, hearing a sermon preached the same way week after week. I have slowly begun to change my preaching style from a lot of celebration at the end to where I teach more in the message. The reason for this is that I want people to feel that they have received a word that would get them through the week or situation rather than feeling that they have been entertained. I also try to use props and/or add people from the congregation in my sermon to make them feel more involved. I may call a member’s name by saying Deacon Smith can witness that many people have been locked up because they allow others to think for them. Another thought that I develop from listening to other pastors is how they involved members of the

church in the decision process. I try to have quarterly meeting with my trustees and deacons on various subject matters involving the church. In these meetings we exchange ideas to see how they will grasp it and hopefully turn it into a reality. For example, I tossed out an idea of recognizing the month of May as women health awareness month. This idea went over well. There were some ideas that didn't go over so well. As I continue to "Rethink church" I began to look at how we do business in the traditional Baptist church setting. The first thing I did was start looking at the small things in the church and the way we maybe doing church that may be unintentionally turning people away from church both inside and out. I didn't look at all our ministries at right away but I looked at and observed how we worship and fellowship with one another as a beginning review. I asked myself: Are the programs, policies and regulations of the church too rigid? As a result, do the people feel at home here? Are our traditions preventing people from being involved in ministry? I believe the answer to these question is yes.

The church has a constitution and by-laws for the operation of the church. I formed a committee to relook at the rules, policies and regulation of our church to make them a little more flexible. I instituted a congregational fellowship during worship service. I have the church stand and greet one another. My view is that something small makes a big difference. My observation since instituting this practice during worship service is that people are more relaxed in general, though there are some of the members who do not accept this change.

The notion of rethinking church is a challenge in this setting. It will take time, patience, and understanding of why there might be resistance to change.

**Bring the church to the people**

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I am coming to the conclusion as are many pastors, that the old idea of bringing the people to the church is no longer working. In this setting, a small rural town, many people know that the church exists in the neighborhood but they do not see or experience the church in the community, as community. Therefore, the church has to be more visible in the community through the actions and connections of church members and leaders. In this notion of church in turning from a “build it and they will come” mentality to we engage in fostering relationships through listening to people where and as they are, we are embodying the gospel of Jesus Christ. The simplest thing to do is to go out and ask them to come and to listen. I found out that one of the reasons many people do not come to church is because no one has asked them to come. This seems so simple and yet we will ask anyone to buy dinners, donate to car washes and for some churches raffle tickets for fund raisers but do we ask them to come to church? I believe if we ask people with sincerity people will come.

Our church is located in Columbus County. During the recent health assessment given by the state, the county where Mt Moriah is located is rated last. I’ve taken this as an advantage to bring the church to the people through offering a health fair from either the church or one of the centers in the area. Other area churches may be invited to come together to help me promote this. This way the people will see the church in action. In summary, action and active witnessing through participating in the community is a first step.

## Chapter 5

### Joy Restoration

The congregation can restore the joy that was lost though it cannot do this of its own accord.. They can be revived again and rejoice like they once they used to by recognizing the Holy Spirit at work already—calling them to understand their own spiritual DNA and how to maintain the joy they have.

#### **Recognize the Viruses**

Peter Steinke shares a quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer “ An element of sickness gets into the body perhaps nobody knows where it comes from or in what member it has lodged, but the body is infected”<sup>16</sup> In each church the joy that seem lost may be cause by the infectious virus. Church viruses come in many forms. It can be very small such as gossiping or as large as grumblers or complainers. When the body is infected it causes a breakdown that can destroy everything. When my computer was infected with a virus it began destroying my hard drive which damaged the information that I had stored. I didn’t know where exactly the virus came from but the fact of the matter it was there. I had two choices either

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<sup>16</sup> Peter Steinke, Healthy Congregations, (Herndon VA, Alban Institute)



leave the virus along or do something that will eliminate it so that the computer can operate properly.

The church body has to recognize the viruses. The church may not know exactly where it started but it must know how to defuse it. The older generation would say that you have to nip it in the bud. A virus that flow through the body of the church unnoticed will destroy the joy. When one of the members stated that she felt that the church was dying may be the result that she notices that there is a virus and it has not been cured.

There is one thing that I noticed when it comes to viruses. Viruses are very contagious and is not always the results one be infected by someone but by something. Growing up we are always taught to clean and disinfect our surroundings. If we do not, then we will pick up some germ that can get us sick. In this case as related to the church a virus can be the effect of some event. I have been to some churches that the results of the spiritual joy were not because to that feelings toward one another but something that happen within inside the church as far back as 20,30 or 40 years ago that still has an effect on the church. The substance to the event could be stress, anxiety, a tragic event (Death of a pastor or unresolved issue) or doing the same routine Sunday after Sunday. When the church recognizes and deals with the viruses the joy will remain.

### **Nurture Relationship**

Relationships are very important to the spiritual joyfulness for the church. I understand that everyone may not get along but for the sake of the ministry we need each other. Everybody and every position is very important and must work together to get the job done.

When I think of nurturing relationships I think of the Three Musketeers. The slogan of the Three Musketeers was “All for one and one for all.” Basically it means All have ONE common GOAL, that all are working for, so they will work together to reach that goal. It's a great motto for teamwork and the ability to get things done if all on a team work for it. Christians around the world continue to face persecution and unfortunately many are killed because of their faith every year. In America, the church seems to be under attack from every side. Yet the biggest threat to the church in America is not the Media, or Secular Humanism, or even Islam. Our biggest threat comes from the inside. The weapons that are being used against the church are not rifles and missiles. It's our own words and attitudes. Unfortunately, too many Christians in America today are being seriously wounded not because of wounds they received from fighting the forces of evil, but from wounds that are a direct result of friendly fire. We have to work together and strengthen our relationships. In Mark 3:24-26 Jesus states and if a kingdom be divided against itself that kingdom cannot stand. If a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand and if Satan rise up against himself and be divided he cannot stand but hath an end. If the leaders and the members of the church stand divide the work of the ministry will not be successful. The success of the ministry relies on our ability to work as a team. Team work involves many people who are often very different. Paul reminds us in his letter to Corinth that there are different kinds of gifts but the same spirit. There are different kinds of service but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working but the same God works all of them in all men. The key word in this passage is the word different. It is mentioned 3 times. We have different kinds of gifts, there are different ways to serve and there are different workings. There is not just one gift that fits all believers. Teams work for the good of everybody.

There is a story I heard about 4 people in the church named EVERYBODY, SOMEBODY, ANYBODY and NOBODY. There was an important job to be done and EVERYBODY was sure that SOMEBODY would do it. ANYBODY could have done it but instead NOBODY did it. SOMEBODY got angry about this, because it was EVERYBODY'S job. EVERYBODY thought ANYBODY would do it but NOBODY realized that EVERYBODY wouldn't do it. It ended up that EVERYBODY blamed SOMEBODY when NOBODY did what ANYBODY could have done.

Bridging generation gaps in the church may seem like a lot of work, but the rewards will be worth it. It will foster unity and provide a purpose that is larger than any individual generation's hopes and experiences.

#### **“The Generations in Your Church Today”\***

A cultural generation is a cohort of people whose youth was shaped by a particular set of events and trends. Because of these shared experiences, cultural generations develop similar values and approaches toward life.

#### **The Silent Generation** (born between 1933 and 1945)

This generation grew up in the years following the Great Depression. The harsh economic climate of childhood taught them discipline and self-sacrifice. Over the course of their lives, this generation saw their affluence increase. They tend to be team players who are loyal to organizations. They have a huge knowledge legacy to share and a strong work ethic.

#### **The Baby Boomers** (born between 1946 and 1964)

Boomers grew up in a time of unprecedented economic prosperity and post-war hopefulness. They were typically raised in nuclear families, most often with a stay-at-home mom. Boomers worked hard and were rewarded for it. They tend to be optimistic and driven by success. Because of their sheer numbers (they are the largest generation alive today), they have dominated the workforce for decades. Boomers excel in tackling issues and finding solutions.

#### **Generation X** (born between 1965 and 1976)

Divorce and working moms became the new normal for this generation, and many in this generation demonstrate characteristics of independence, resiliency and flexibility. Gen Xers came of age during a major recession. They saw their parents laid off after decades of service. Many graduated from university to find few jobs and opportunities. As a result, Gen Xers became loyal, not to organizations, but rather to their work, their team or their boss. Gen Xers thrive in situations that minimize rules and maximize flexibility and participation. They value feedback and are looking for meaning in their work.

**The Millennials** (born between 1977 and 1998)

Raised in a child-centric world, this generation has been showered with attention and held in high regard by the adults in their lives. As a result, they are self-confident and achievement-oriented. Technology has surrounded them from birth, and they are more techno-savvy than any previous generation. Their parents involved them in many social, sports and school activities, and they are masters in multi-tasking. They thrive in teams and expect structure.”<sup>17</sup>

Another thing that the Mt Moriah has to look at is the differences in generations. To be able to keep the joy alive the church must use the young people and recognize their talents. Most of the young people in the church are multitasked. I listened to many of the younger individuals talk and I found it common that they want to be involved in church but they are not given many opportunities. One thing that I hoped that the committee would have done when preparing for this project was to use a couple of young people.

Young people’s involvement in in church is crucial to keep the harmony and because of this the church has to know how to adapt to accept them in worship service.

**Follow the Mission**

Once the church understands how to nurture relationships then they can properly follow the mandate that Jesus states recorded in the gospel of St. Matthew chapter 28:19-20. We have to go out and make disciples. A disciple is a learner. A disciple study God’s word, a

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<sup>17</sup> Rachel Boehm Van Harmelen, “When the Generation Gap Comes to Church”, <https://www.crcna.org/SPE-draft/resources/spe-published-items/when-generation-gap-comes-church>

disciple knows when and how to pray. The question remains how do we follow the mandate that was left by Jesus for us? The purpose of the church is to worship, proclaim and witness. Worship is something that is not only done on Sunday morning. It can be done any day, anywhere, and anytime of the week.

### **Conclusion**

To restore the spiritual joy in the church we have to understand our spiritual DNA. The ministry is not just in the four walls. A wall separate and divides us. Walls block the progress of sharing Jesus Christ and the mission of the church from others. There is more to the great commission than to coming into the church to sing, pray, preach from the pulpit. If we are not out serving as agents of change, winning souls for our Lord and Savior but instead arguing with one another or going through the same routine week after week that we are not on a mission we are in a mess. The late Rev. E. V. Hill states that the problem with the church is that we are more keepers of the aquarium instead of being fishers of men. Are we on a mission or are we in a mess? I want to believe that we are on a mission but it seems that we are more in a mess. One of my main goals and notion for church is to have the church be more visible in the community. I hoping that they will see us in the schools, in both the city and county council meetings and in the community where people shop and hangout. There are walls that have to be torn down. We still have walls of racism. We still have walls of sexism. We still have walls of unbelief but we can break down the walls. As a pastor I believe that I have an obligation to respond to the social injustices of our society in the pulpit and in the community. This notion of church or vision is more to me than just having big church programs and building larger sanctuaries. I have a mission which comes from a deep concern for the quality of life both in the

church and the community. For this notion or understanding to be successful the church must rethink church, bring the church to the people and follow the mandate the Jesus has left us.

## Chapter 6

### Lessons Learned

Then I came to them of the captivity at Telabib, that dwelt by the river of Chebar, and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days.<sup>18</sup>

When I served in the U. S. Air Force, after the conclusion of every inspection all the different sections in each organization would meet together. The first thing that we would do, is read the final inspection report and reviews all the findings that were mention in the report. When the final report was read and discussed, we would then begin to write a report called “Lessons Learned”. In this report we would identify the problems areas and write about what we learned from them and how we were going to plan to correct the problems area so that we will be better than we were before. This is basically the same process that I needed to do with this assessment.

This has been an incredible journey for me in this process listening to the stories and the narratives from the congregation at Mt. Moriah Missionary Baptist church. I must admit the more stories that I listened to the scary it got. Some of the stories came out of anger and some were out of joy while they were reflecting from the past. I selected the verse from

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<sup>18</sup> Ezekiel 3:15 KJV

the book of Ezekiel to climax what I have learned from this journey. I have learned many things about this church and at the same time I learned somethings about myself as a pastor.

During my observations of the church I made many conclusions about them more from my observations and my own thinking but Ezekiel had me to look at this this from another prospectus. I had to sit where they sat and understand what they thought from their observations and thinking.

This journey started out with from one statement from a member of the congregation “The church is dying.” The question I raised to myself is why she thinks the church is dying. After listening to the stories and the narratives I began to draw my own conclusions and looked at the tasks/issues that were laid out for me. The reasons the church seems to be dying is the role of leadership in view of the congregations’ expectations. The congregation has a certain expectation from their church leadership. Reflection on being initiative to their roles in expanding and strengthen the established ministries of the church. This was a struggle in the beginning of my ministry at the church. I would share with them the fact that we know what programs or events were coming about. The end of each year all the chairperson/presidents of each ministry would come together and plan the church calendar for the year. I shared with them that you should try to contact whomever you want to speak at these events at least 60 day in advance of the schedule program. I have found that many of them wouldn’t take the initiative to follow through with what needs to be done. One day I spoke to someone at church about this and I was told during that conversation that they are more use to someone telling them what to do versus taking the steps necessary to do it on their own.



When I heard this response that is when I realized that my role as a Pastor must change from what my thought pattern of what a pastor should be. When we had our 150<sup>th</sup> church celebration it surprised me that the person who stated that the church was dying took the initiative to take on the lead role of this event.

The last reason was their willingness to be committed. One of the task that I was trying to accomplish was to express how we need to be more committed to the ministry at Mt.

Moriah. Programs and ministries are not going to be successful unless we are all committed to it. When I first came to Mt. Moriah I observed something that I never seen before. Men were mostly on one side and women on the other. I also notice that some of the officers of the church weren't sitting together. I thought to myself there's a commitment problem. One of the first things I addressed at our quarterly Deacons and Trustees meeting is that we must be on one accord with each other. We must also show that we are committed to whatever tasks that is brought before us. If the congregation doesn't see that we are committed to the church and each other, they will not be committee. I had a series of sermon messages to let them realized the united we stand and divide we fall. I had a bible study lesson explaining that we all are a part of the body of Christ even though we are different and have different skill and talents. I knew that this task will take some time.

There was something stronger underneath the surface that hasn't come out yet to cure this problem.

There are many good ministries that the church has adopted during their years of existence.

In order to expand and strengthen the ministries they have to be willing to accept change.

The word of God hasn't change but the process to share and express the word of the Lord has changed. The church can't do ministry the same way today as it did forty years ago.

They must understand the practices of the present generation especially as technology has evolved and so has the practices of this present age generation. In chapter 5 I showed the different generation groups and how their views differ with our views toward life. Finally we have to relook at our understanding of church both theologically and spirituality. The practices of worship service has changed. Robert N. Nash Jr., raises the question in his book entitled “An 8-Track Church in a CD world”, “Can the church learn to live in the postmodern world and be unafraid of its challenges?” This chapter will address both the research method and theological reflection as necessary tools.

### **Research Options for the Future**

One of the major research tools that I will use to accomplish the tasks at hand is Ethnography. Ethnography is a way to tap the deep undercurrents in a community through a process of gathering, analyzing, and sharing data. This type of research will help me to have a stronger dialogue with the congregation by asking them well thought out questions. This research tool will allow me as the pastor to step down from my pastoral role and really listen to what the congregation is saying. I will be able to clearly observe not only what is being said but also take a close look at the non-verbal as well.

As mention earlier, one of the members felt that the church is dying before I can implement or change any policies or order of worship. I have to understand her definition of a dying church also in the same light study about what tools are needed to explore her views of a dying church and what it take to revive it. This type of research will help us explore a deeper meaning about our spiritual DNA. It will determine how we view Christ as it comes down to their faith in God.

Ethnography as a pastoral practice also draws from narrative models of theory and care. Our lives are embedded in stories that influence us and describe the range of possibilities that we can imagine for our lives.<sup>19</sup> In this research I will define this from a cultural and theological perspective.

### **Theological Reflection:**

Theologically thinking as we reflect on our own understanding of our Spiritual DNA we find that all of us have done and still do some type of theological reflection. Now some in the church may not label themselves as theologians but practically they are. Henry Stone and James Duke states:

Even so, we hold to a time honored conviction that when Christians are baptized the enter into a ministry they all share responding to a God-given call to disclose the gospel (God's good news of Jesus Christ) through all they say and do. Their calling makes them witnesses the make in the course of their daily lives sets forth their implicit understanding of the meaning of the Christian Faith and—in keeping with another time honored conviction—because Christian theology is at its roots a matter of faith seeking understanding<sup>20</sup>.

Theological reflections is defined as the process of thinking about the meaning of faith in the Christian message of God or a simple way of putting it is faith seeking understanding. Theological reflection is also the process in many respects like a craft, it involves working with various materials or resources, applying certain skills that can be learned and honed over time by concentration and practices. It also involves humbly seeking to understand and articulate God's nature and work in the world. If we think about it this makes a great deal of sense. One of the main reasons we go to Sunday school, Bible Study or vacation bible school is to learn more about the Christ and to also believe in and strengthen our faith

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<sup>19</sup> Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*. (Cleveland OH, The Pilgrim Press, 2008).

<sup>20</sup> Howard W. Stone & James O. Duke, *How to Think Theologically* (Minneapolis Mn Fortress Press, 2013).

in Him. To be a Christian at all is to be a theologian. There are no exceptions. We are always searching for the truth. I believe that congregations and pastors are still asking the aged old question is there any word from the Lord. Even to this day we are still going to seminars, workshops, and studying new material to broaden our theological understanding of our faith. There are many pastors and lay persons enrolling in a seminary or bible college trying to expand their knowledge and understanding of the faith. There was a statement made to me when I started seminary. When you go to seminary, there are some thing you can take with you and the rest leave in the classroom. To this day this statement still bothers me and I have repeated to others before. What do I take with me and what do I leave behind. I was afraid that I leave behind the wrong thing which may discourage someone struggling with the faith.

**Critical Analysis:**

“Ethnography, as I construct it in this book, is a form of pastoral listening that analogously help a congregation or a community to find its collective voice”. I have learned in my short time as a pastor is that the most effective pastor is not the one who only preaches well, administrates well or teaches well. The most effective pastor is the one who knows how to listen well. Many of times the people are trying to tell the pastor their understanding of beliefs and practices but the pastor hears them but really is not listening to what is being said. I’m convinced that about 30% of my troubles I incurred as the pastor could have been avoided or solved if I would’ve listen more effectively. When the young lady approached me about the church is dying, I heard her but really wasn’t listening because I had already had in my mind what the problem was from previous observations. I have been told that the hardest skill that many people have is listening.

In preparation to begin an effective narrative I have to know my audience, When understand the audience that I need to address dictates the type of question that I need to ask. Once I ask the right question I will be able to write about what I hear and begin to reflect on those answers. During the dialogue with the lay committee when I started the process, I raised the question when did the church feel that it was alive. They began sharing stories on the different ministries that do not exist at present day. They discuss the role of the leadership and their commitment to the ministry also the strength of the church as far as the membership. They were proud to be known as the mother church and the lead of all the churches in the area. The question that I should have ask was what changed that this church is not as vibrant as before?

I reflect back to the book of Ezekiel that was mention earlier. The prophet reflected on the statement “I sat where they sat”. When I think Ethnography as a resource tool, I find myself going back to this verse. I had to move myself into the position to see what they see. Why can’t they change with the times or why can’t we move forward? The conclusion I noticed was the problem was the reflection on the church because was has been embedded in our spiritual DNA.

Mary Moshella shares about the thick description; Thick description is a detailed and interpretive description that conveys your understanding of the deep meaning of your observation. In chapter 2, I made an observation about change using the illustration that Jesus used about pouring new wine into old goatskins. I was trying to have them to understand that the ministries that were present years ago worked great for that generation of people but because times have change, we have to have some new ideas that would richly help the people of today. I believe that the church is trying to accomplish this but

trying to do this the same way as before. It is as if we are trying to stick our agenda in theirs and make it work. One day I shared with the congregation the title of a book that I mention in the beginning of this chapter entitled an “8-track church in a CD world”. I used this title because I knew it was something that they could understand and relate to. I mention that everyone here knows about 8-tracks. Many of us had them in our homes or in our cars but we don’t used them anymore because times and technology has changed and the stores weren’t selling them anymore. The younger people thought that this was funny because most of them never heard of 8-track tapes. We adapted with the change. I remembered when I first arrive to Mt. Moriah, we were preparing for our fall revival. During revival those that attended wanted copies of the services and we said yes but not many people wanted our copies because we were still recording the service on cassette tapes. The responses were we can use them because we don’t cassette players to play them on. Everyone was now using cd. If I used this analogy, I wonder how our 8-track ministry would last in a cd ministry. If we can adapt to material things then why can’t our ministry adapt to change as well. No one could really gave me a good answer.

Christian theological reflection interprets the meanings of things from the perspective of the Christian message of faith in God. To understand is what people understand their Christian faith to mean varies from one age to another, from denomination to denomination, from congregation to congregation and from person to person. There are two types of theology that needs to be understood.

### **Embedded Theology**

We learn about our understanding of faith from many encounters with our Christianity whether it’s formal or informal, planned or unplanned. Our understanding of faith

disseminated by the church and assimilated by the members in our daily lives. Christian practices also communicate the meaning of Christian faith. Children learn, learn for example that being Christian means going to church for worship and knowing how to behave there, when to stand, sit or kneel, when to listen, pray or sing. They do this because it's embedded in us.

Stone and Duke makes an interesting point because many of us worship from what has been instilled in us when we were young. It's also interesting because as I grow older, how I come to understand about faith and how I worship Christ I still do the same way because of what I learned as a child. I enter the church a certain way, I speak and address people a certain way because of what has been embedded in me. As I refer back to the verse in Ezekiel and I have to sit were they sat to have better understanding to what has been embedded in them.

Mediating on this thought about embedded theology has made me realized something about myself and the congregation at Mt. Moriah in the following three statements:

First – I had a misunderstanding about this process because I thought that there was a problem about change. They are substible to change but I tried to change what has already been embedded in them to see thing my way. For example the one of the reason why I'm Baptist is because my mother and father is Baptist and so are the past generations before me. I have been taught about the understanding of my faith based on what I was taught through our traditions and from the sermons and Sunday school lessons at church. This is what I know. I was trying to change the way they do church to the way I do church.

Second – I had a misunderstanding about this process because I didn't look at it from a cultural point of view. I was born and raised in New York but the church that I had the pleasure to pastor is in the south. Even though we are under the Baptist doctrine our interpretation of our faith is different. I was under the assumption that because we were all Baptist we were doing the same thing and had the same beliefs. I'm now finding out that this is not the case. For example I never knew that there were churches that only worshipped two Sunday's a month or that some churches have a problem with women in ministry. Growing up in New York this wasn't a problem for me.

Finally I was not effectively communicated what needs to be done or change because I was under the assumption they would understand. I was talking above them and around instead of talking to them in a way that they would understand. I realized that Christians will rise up to defend their theological convictions or express outrage when those convictions are threatened especially when it interferes with tradition.

### **Deliberative Theology**

Our embedded theology may seem so natural and feel so comfortable that we carry it within us for years; unquestioned and perhaps even unspoken except when we join in the words of others at worship.<sup>21</sup> Deliberative theology is a process of reflecting on multiple understandings of the faith implicit in the life and witness of Christians in order to identify and/or develop the most adequate understanding possible. From a pastor point of view it's the why things happen that way they do. This type of theology helps me as a pastor to try to

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.



understand why things happen. I remember asking myself if the people in the church know so much about God and stated that they trust him then how come when problems comes or something that has to be done is out of the norm, why do they seem to give up? It is my belief that we continue to struggle with what is rooted deep down inside us. I recall what a preacher sated years ago in a message. He stated that he believes that we have been taught wrong for years. We are taught to see then believe instead of believing without seeing. I basically agree with this statement because I find myself stating that I will believe it when I see it. I wonder if this is one of the reason that many struggle with the faith. If I say to the congregation or to the one that we can revive this ministry just have faith. I wonder if the response would be Yes, we can do this with excitement or I will believe when I see it.

Deliberative reflection inspects a range of alternative understandings in search of that which is most satisfactory and seeks to formulate the meaning of faith as clearly and coherently as possible it also carries us forwarded when embedded theology proves inadequate. I liked to look at this that it helps me to think outside of the box. To grow in faith is to deepen, extend and perhaps revise our understanding of its meaning and to arrive at clearer means by which to state and act on our convictions. I have to look at myself first and be willing to step out of my own comfort zone and recognize that how I'm leading is not working. To grow in faith I have to be willing to reach out a little further than I'm used to. Once I accomplish this task then I can approach to the congregation to help them relook to what is not working and how can we change from the everyday routine. I have to learn how to engaged the church in deliberative theological reflection as part of our Christian calling. Howard Stone and James Duke shared that:

“Those who set out on its path surely hope that the journey will be pleasant and its outcome enriching. That hope is a possibility but by no means a certainty. Striving for a degree of distance from our embedded understanding of faith and subjecting it to a searching examination may prove hard and painful work. It may lead to a dark night of the soul or to some forty days or many years in the wilderness.”

I concur with this statement because we all would like to see that best of everything but that is not always the case. I always like to hear that I'm a good pastor but I have to accept in reality that I have some flaws and that I have to face these flaws. This is so with the church congregation. They have to accept that reason that the church may be dying as far as spirituality, because they are not willing to go beyond their comfort zone.

As Christians we are called to pursue growth in faith by relearning and reinforcing what we already understand faith to be and by expanding, deepening and even correcting our initial understanding of the faith. We must be willing to go further from where we are now.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

In the beginning of the chapter I mention a phrase called “Lesson learned”. What have I learned on this journey about the Spiritual DNA of the church and myself as a pastor? Just like I used to do when I was in the U.S. Air Force I began to write down my lessons learned reflection. During this journey that I learned, that I can't take things for granted. I entered in a pastoral role with preconceived ideas, some that I received when I went to seminary and some from the advice of other pastors.. I learned that I had to sit where they sat to see things from there point of view. Mt. Moriah was the first church that I pastored. I figure that with my number of years as an associate minister and my training from seminary that I was ready. It felt like the time I accepted the call to ministry. I thought that I could preach anything to anybody and that I could make the difference because of my title.

When I began my start in pastoral ministry there was a big difference. Just because I was the pastor that didn't mean everyone was going to accept what I say and do. When I would have a problem I would go to some senior or seasoned pastors and I heard what they were saying but not really listening.

When the members of the church spoke I was listening but not really hearing what they were saying because I was the seminary trained and educated pastor. When I preached, taught or gave instructions sometimes it was not well received. I remember one day my pastor and I was talking and he stated to me you have to get country with the people in other words I know that you are seminary trained but the people you served aren't seminary students. Sometimes you have to bring your level down a notch so they can understand and follow you. Mary Clark Moschella book on Ethnography helped me to understand how to really listen. It taught me to be slow to speak but quick to listen. When a member of the church comes to me especially one who complains often, I was already quick let the words go through one ear and out the other and give a response. Sometimes my response is the wrong response all because I was not listening.

Recalling back to the beginning of this project I now reflect on the stories that were told to me I also now sit back and recall the stories that were told around the table when we would fellowship with one another most especially, the stories that were being echoed during the fun day prior to our Homecoming and church anniversary. These are stories that I will never forget. It seem that the stories began to come alive. They were so vivid that it was like I was actually there when the event took place. It was through the stories that I began to have a closer rapport with some of the members. It was through the stories that I learned

how hard it was to effectively operate a church and what church members expected from the pastor.

There are many days and nights that I would sit down to reflect on my role as the pastor of Mt. Moriah. Sometimes I would write down my thoughts as I take a moment with God. I often wondered did I make a difference at church that day. If I did what was it that I said or did to change someone's life or strengthen their faith of belief in God? There were times when I would randomly asked someone in the church if I made a difference in their life and the stories will start all over again.

The ones who answer yes stated that I did because they felt the compassion that they were looking for and how I would portray that compassion in terms of Christ. Some say that when I'm delivering the message that can literally hear the words of the Lord come out and into their souls. One person stated that the message help them better learn who they were as the y come closer into know Christ but all the answers weren't as great as these. Some said that they couldn't follow me because I read too much from my manuscript. There wasn't much eye contact with that person. Another stated that sometime that length of the message was too long.

Even though some of those statements hurt a little made me listen to them to help improve myself as a pastor. It also help me because I was looking for God's voice through other ways such as my bible reading but in reality He was speaking to me through them along and it took me a few years to understand this. It was these tough times and story telling that help me grow stronger in my faith.

Since reading about ethnography and reflecting on this I have found that it has made me rediscover my spiritual DNA. It made realized that because of the many things that were

embedded in me; I was unable to see other viewpoints. I found myself like a horse at a horse race. I had my blinders on and all I could see is straight ahead and if their thoughts weren't in my view of things, I didn't hear them or consider them. It also made me realized that I have to look at both sides of the church (pastoral and congregation), to provide effective ministry.

When I started to pastor a church, other pastors would tell me you are the one in charge and you have the final say. It was basically what you say goes but I'm discovering that to make positive change takes all of us to find that one common ground to work together to accomplish the spiritual goals of ministry. It is not about me nor about you but it's about only what we do for Christ will last.

When I started this project with our 150<sup>th</sup> church celebration I was more focus on what and how the church should rediscover their spiritual DNA but in the process I found out that I also had to rediscover mine as well. I also had some embedded theology me that needed to be flushed out. After the celebration was over and many of our guest had returned back home the focus has shifted to develop and reshaped the ministries that we have furthermore to continue to expand our understanding about our role in the church, and community so that no one can consider themselves apart of a dying church.

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