

ANDERSON UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

INSIDE OUT: A DETAILED PLAN FOR IMPROVING
SPIRITUAL HEALTH AT OLDE TOWNE COMMUNITY CHURCH,
RIDGELAND, MISSISSIPPI

A PROFESSIONAL PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DOCTOR OF
MINISTRY STUDIES PROGRAM IN CANDIDACY FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

MARSHALL E. STOKES

ANDERSON, INDIANA

MARCH 11, 2009

ABSTRACT

Corporate spiritual health is the focus of this Professional Project. For many years, church growth was the prevailing focus of the western church. Noted leaders heralded the need for the church to grow numerically through various means. A necessary complement to the church growth movement is now church health, which seeks to improve the spiritual wellness and maturity of the body of Christ. This Professional Project chronicles the story of the Olde Towne Community Church congregation in Ridgeland, Mississippi, which began as a church plant in 1990, and reached a numerical and spiritual plateau by the year 2000.

Divided into two major sections, assessment and improvement, this Professional Project examines the local context of ministry, its historical roots, and ministry challenges. The Project presents a detailed plan to improve the spiritual health factor of the congregation. The assessment component is largely aided by two evaluative tools: Natural Church Development and Root Cause Analysis. Natural Church Development is the product of German theologian, Christian Schwarz; this tool offers a detailed questionnaire to parishioners to assess spiritual vitality and wellness. A Root Cause Analysis is a non-punitive systems tool for quality improvement that has been developed and used in the secular workplace to identify the contributing cause(s) for problematic issues.

The improvement component is aided by both evaluative tools listed in the previous paragraph, as well as a biblical commentary on Ephesians 4:1-16, a

theological commentary on the constitution and calling of the church, and a review of church health in contemporary literature. These items coalesce to forge a strategy for improved corporate spiritual health for a local congregation. Improving spiritual health takes courage, commitment, buy-in from local leaders, and a detailed written plan. Plateaued congregations can begin again; this is the story of one such local body.