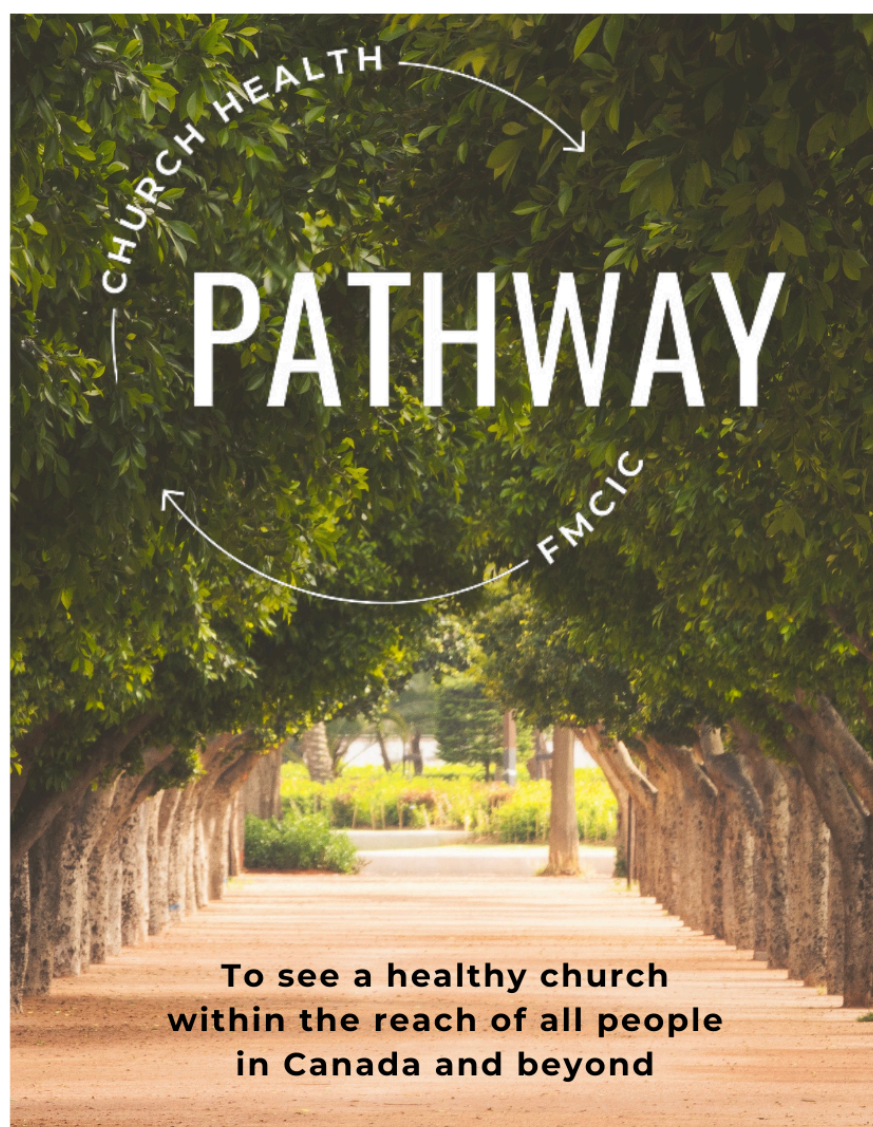


REVITALIZATION

EMPOWERING YOUR CHURCH TO PURSUE
A JOURNEY OF HEALTH



SEE GOD'S PLAN | DISCERN YOUR CONTEXT | CLOSE THE GAP





An updated Church Health Process for the Free Methodist Church in Canada

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Please note that this is the initial/pilot draft of our new Church Health Pathway (October 2024).

¹ The initial version of this document was created by Rev. Jervis Djokoto and reviewed by Regional & Church Planting Coaches, Rev. Dr. Cliff Fletcher (former FMCIC Bishop), Rev. Dan Sheffield, Rev. Jessica Isaak, and Lorilee Bishop. Initial Feedback was incorporated by March 2024. After Bishop Linda Adams was consecrated as Bishop April 2024, this document underwent further revision with input from her and an executive consultant by August 2024. As this is a living document, please feel free to send us your comments or questions as you read along. Our hope is to have a concrete document and plan by end of 2024.



PREAMBLE: OUR VISION & HEALTH



It is the vision of The Free Methodist Church in Canada

“to see a healthy church within the reach of all people in Canada and beyond.”

‘To see:’ The inaugural line of our vision statement, encapsulated in the term “to see,” underscores the fundamental importance we attribute to perceptive insight in realizing our goals as a movement. Much like John Wesley’s transformative Aldersgate experience in 1738, where he encountered a profound internal illumination upon rediscovering the Gospel (through Martin Luther’s preface to Romans), our vision commences with the power of clear perception. This is the basis for the health we seek for our lives and ministries. This form of “seeing” is not confined to intellectual understanding but involves an intrinsic and compelling insight from the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the actualization of our vision hinges on this ability to see God’s plan (Missio Dei, the divine economy of God) in Scripture with clarity. Hence, initiating our journey toward church health with a keen focus on developing a profound and accurate understanding of God’s plan becomes imperative. For instance, our vision is to establish healthy churches that are accessible to all in Canada and beyond. However, to realize this vision, we must first comprehend the nuanced definition of “healthy.” Consequently, our initial step involves elucidating and embracing a comprehensive and current understanding of what constitutes a healthy church, among other things.

‘A Healthy Church:’ Our vision at The Free Methodist Church in Canada is to witness the emergence of vibrant and healthy churches accessible to all, not only in Canada but also extending beyond our borders. This means that we firmly believe that the health of a church is paramount and serves as the foundation for effective outreach, community impact, and the establishment of new congregations. This also means that a healthy Church always reaches out beyond itself.

This does not imply we wait to be healthy in order to reach out. It implies we prioritize church health as the cornerstone of our mission, recognizing that a flourishing and spiritually robust church is better equipped to reach out to the community, positively impact its surroundings, and actively establish new congregations. This emphasis on health ensures that our churches are inwardly strong and outwardly focused, actively contributing to transforming the lives of individuals and the communities they serve.

Our commitment to being **'within reach'** signifies our dedication to making the Christian faith accessible to everyone. We envision a church that breaks down barriers and welcomes people from all walks of life, embracing diversity and multiculturalism as integral aspects of our identity. In the spirit of our founder, BT Roberts, and guided by the principles of the Frees, we strive to create an inclusive and welcoming environment where individuals from various social backgrounds and cultures can find a home within our faith community. By upholding the legacy of John Wesley and BT Roberts and adhering to the various "Frees" – freedom for all, freedom from sin, freedom of the Spirit, and freedom from secret societies, etc. – we aim to foster an atmosphere where everyone feels valued, accepted, and empowered to live out their Christian faith.

Recognizing the unique context of our ministry, we focus our efforts **'in Canada.'** Understanding the distinct challenges and opportunities that come with ministering in this diverse and vast country, we seek to tailor our approach to meet the needs of our local communities. By contextualizing our ministry within the Canadian context and the communities where we serve, we aim to be responsive and effective in addressing the spiritual and social needs of those we serve in Canada.

'And Beyond!' This last phrase points us to an external non-Canadian goal. We believe that God has called us to have proper perception, to be healthy and accessible, not so that we may feel good about ourselves in Canada as a movement, but that people, even outside the walls of our Canadian context, may see and experience Jesus and be transformed. Hence, our vision extends beyond ourselves, embracing a global missional vision and orientation.

In summary, our vision is a tapestry woven with the threads of Church Health, Accessibility, Multiculturalism, the Canadian Context and Beyond. As we strive to see a healthy church within the reach of all people in Canada and beyond, we are committed to embodying these principles in our mission, ensuring that our churches actively contribute to the well-being and transformation of individuals, communities, and the world at large.





A Working Definition of Church Health

Over the past few years, the FMCIC has undergone a restructuring process aimed at revitalizing and strengthening the organization. In line with this vision, the Church Health (CH) Department was combined with the Church Planting Department. Our combined CH department's primary objective can be summed up as “revitalization.”² Our commitment is to continue to invest in developing healthy churches that reach out powerfully in Jesus’ name.

After the nationwide listening tour in 2023, one of our first tasks was to develop a precise and pragmatic definition of Church Health that could effectively guide our work. Next was to attempt to operationalize this vision through a condensed Church Health Pathway.

Below is a preliminary attempt at a working definition of church health based on biblical principles. This Church Health definition aims to describe what a healthy church is and what it does. It has been developed by considering and consolidating previous church health definitions and tools.

The Working Definition

“A healthy church is a biblically-grounded, Jesus-centered, Spirit-empowered, and mission-oriented community of lifelong disciples (who are given over to the values, priorities, and practices of the Kingdom of God individually and collectively.)

By grounding each aspect of our definition in biblical principles and incorporating key practices, we can effectively communicate this and implement a holistic approach to church health in alignment with our FM vision and the teachings of Scripture. Let's look at each component and provide scriptural support and critical practices.

² According to Wallas, “A revitalization movement is defined as a deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture.”

Biblically-grounded:

- *Key Text:* **2 Timothy 3:16-17** - "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."
- *Main Idea:* Scripture is our ultimate guide to understanding God's plan and will for our lives and churches. In it, we see Jesus as the central figure. Hence, a healthy church prioritizes scripture and what it says about Jesus above ideas, strategies, human experience, and our own will. Scripture is the cornerstone of everything a healthy church does.

According to Wallas, "A revitalization movement is defined as a deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture."

- *Key Practice:* Regular and systematic study of the bible that continues to elevate the person of Christ, through strategic bible studies, sermons, and small groups.

Jesus-Centred:

- *Key Text:* **Colossians 1:18** - "*And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.*"
- *Main Idea:* Jesus is the head of the church. The important question here becomes, "Is Jesus the active Lord of your church or something or someone else?" Christ is the centre of God's mission on earth. Hence, the mission and mandate of the church must also be centred on Jesus, his death, burial, and resurrection, and the mission that flows from it.
- *Key Practices:* Regularly focus on the life, teachings, and example of Jesus through sermons, bible studies, and discipleship programs. Consistently encourage personal relationship and intimacy with Christ. From board decisions to leadership practices to congregational life, we must be able to say that in all things, Christ has the supremacy!

Spirit-Empowered:

- *Main Text:* **Acts 1:8** - "*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*"
- *Main Idea:* In **Acts 2**, the Spirit came upon the church to empower its mission. A healthy church is one in which there are varieties of gifts in operation by the same Spirit, varieties of service under the same Lordship of Christ and varieties of activities, but the same God empowers them all in everyone. It is a church in which each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good (**1 Cor 12:1-4**). It is the Spirit that offers life and enables us to participate in the ongoing ministry of Christ. As scripture says, the flesh profits nothing (**John 6:63**).

- *Key Practice:* Cultivate a reliance on the Holy Spirit through consistent prayer, seeking and teaching on spiritual gifts from scripture, and encouraging believers to walk in the Spirit daily. Foster an environment where the gifts of the Spirit are recognized, developed, and utilized.

Mission (others)-Oriented:

- *Main Text:* **Matthew 28:19-20** - "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."
- *Main Idea:* A healthy church is a missional church. By 'missional,'" ³ we mean the "Missio Dei," the mission of God, not our mission; it is a church that reaches the unreached with the Gospel everywhere the Spirit leads. Being an eternal community, the Trinity created us with a capacity to participate in that eternal community. We rebelled and left. God the Trinity has been on a mission to reconnect and reconcile with us. As part of that mission, God created the church. The order of things is essential. The church is not our beginning point. The church is a means to an end. It is never the end in and of itself. Churches do not have a mission. God's mission has a Church. So, rather than being bogged down by institutional management, A healthy church "does whatever it takes to continually place the gospel (mission) within reach of those around them, resulting in a worshipping community (transformation) of Jesus-followers (discipleship) who do whatever it takes to continually place the gospel (mission) within reach of those around them resulting in a worshipping community (transformation) of Jesus-followers (discipleship)."³ And the cycle continues. This means a healthy church is also fundamentally a multiplying, planting Church.
- *Key Practice:* Engage in local and global missions, evangelism, and outreach. Heal the laity-clergy divide and equip and empower believers of all ages to share their faith and disciple people of all ages and backgrounds. Develop strategic mission initiatives that align with the values of the Kingdom of God (like caring for the marginalized and poor, etc). By being mission-oriented, we envision an others-orientated church. We envision a church that breaks down barriers and welcomes people from all walks of life, embracing diversity and multiculturalism as integral aspects of its identity.

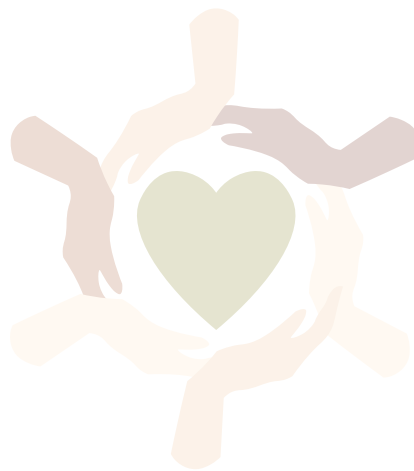


³ This was a definition (of Church Health) which became the working framework of the SATT process many years ago.
See: <https://fmcic.ca/church-health/>

Community of Lifelong Disciples:

- *Key Text:* **Matthew 4:19** - "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people."
- *Main Idea:* Discipleship is not a program but a lifelong journey of following Jesus. A healthy church comprises individuals who have decided to follow Jesus and actively pursue that journey toward complete devotion individually and collectively. Everyone will be at different stages, but everyone needs to be somewhere on that journey. (The Journey Discipleship assessment tool will help your church know where you are on that journey and what areas need help).
- *Key Practices:* To fully disciple, the church should offer diverse experiences - as Jesus did! Jesus taught His disciples, lived with them, camped, journeyed, played, laughed, served others, attended parties, went to temples and synagogues, asked questions, and helped them make a difference in other people's lives. Discipleship in the church must be multi-faceted, just like Jesus' approach. Prioritize discipleship through small groups, mentoring relationships, and intentional spiritual growth plans. Create opportunities for ongoing learning, study, and application of biblical principles in daily life. We are encouraging churches to create a "Discipleship Plan" as a part of their Ministry Plan or strategic plan.⁴

In summary, a Healthy Church is given over to the Values, Priorities, and Practices of the Kingdom of God Individually and Collectively. For the church to maintain its health and vitality in the long run, it needs to prioritize the values and principles of the kingdom of God, including all the practices mentioned above. This will ensure resilience and adaptability, allowing the church to withstand any internal or external pressures and crises, both structurally and spiritually, in order to carry out its God-given assignment. Historically, these values have strengthened the church. Today, they will allow it to effectively recover from crises and regain its previous spiritual fervour- safeguarding the church's spiritual vitality and longevity while effectively combating external and internal influences that aim to undermine local congregations' efforts towards its God-given vision.



⁴ Boards and Pastors can use [The Journey Disciple Survey](#) to determine how their church's activities align with this Church Health Definition.



OUR RENEWED CHURCH HEALTH PATHWAY

Introduction

Having clarified our definition of a healthy church, we now require a strategic framework to guide the implementation of this definition in practice. Therefore, In response to the feedback received from our pastors, we have also streamlined and simplified our Church health approach. We have carefully examined Scripture, our FMCIC history and existing Church Health tools, such as the LifePlan, and integrated their essential elements into this unified journey towards health. Our aim is to empower every church, ensuring that the process is accessible, practical, and conducive to positive transformation. Our aim is to empower every church, ensuring that the process is accessible, practical, and conducive to positive transformation. The goal is for lay leaders and pastors to receive training on understanding this journey and utilizing the new tools effectively. It is a renewed LifePlan.

The central focus of this pathway is not on our desires or intentions but on aligning ourselves with God's actions. Therefore, Instead of asking, 'What do we want to do?' the pivotal question becomes, 'What is God doing here, and how can we closely partner with Him in that work?' The emphasis, therefore, is on recognizing God's revealed plan and responding proactively. Rather than initiating the process by introspection, we start by looking upwards to discern God's actions.

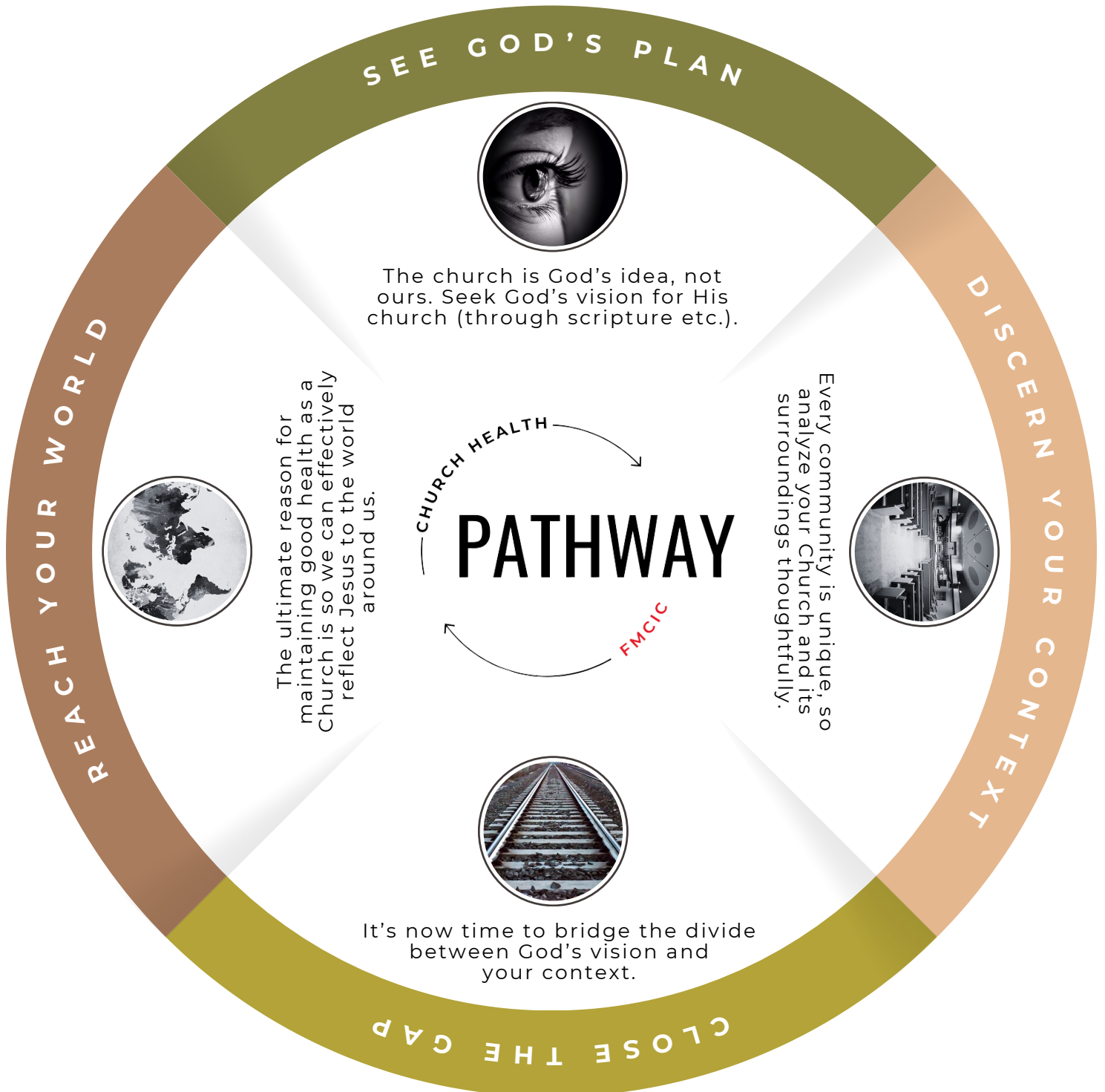
Also, the goal of this journey is not about rushing through a timeline but about purposeful progress, ensuring your church thrives in its mission for years to come. It gives a big-picture journey; therefore, it can be implemented cyclically over several months or even years. Since this road map is meant to support the church's path to better health, it can be used in various ways. Ask God to lead you in how you choose to implement this.

That final destination is God's vision for us. Our location is our context discerned. Like a map, there are many ways to get "there," from "here," but in time, we realize that the way is narrow and that way is still embodied in one person, and His name is Jesus.

Our Church Health Strategy Wheel



A HEALTHY CHURCH IS GIVEN OVER TO THE VALUES, PRIORITIES, AND PRACTICES OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY.



More on our New Revitalization Pathway

Drawing inspiration from the essence of our faith and recognizing the need for simplicity, we have distilled this church journey into three foundational steps with one main outcome:

- I. See God's Plan,**
- II. Discern Your Context,**
- III. Close the Gap.**

Why See God's Plan, Discern Your Context and Close The Gap? So you and your church can reach our world for Jesus. So Reach Your World is included in the process, not as a separate step. But one that speaks directly to the ultimate goal of staying healthy - so that the world may come to know Jesus.

This holistic approach to church health revolves around a continuous cycle: understanding God's Plan, evaluating our Context, and taking action to Close the Gap by devising a plan and implementing necessary changes. This process is meant to be ongoing, like a perpetual loop. Before we can fully appreciate our "here" as a church, we need to see and discern God's "there" and then be able to measure the distance between our "here" and God's "there" in order to effectively close that gap. This is the revitalization pathway!

See God's Plan

'God cannot fit into our plans, we must fit into His,' writes Eugene Peterson. The church is God's idea, not ours. Thus, we should first seek to see and internalize God's vision for His church instead of hastily attempting to create ours. Just as the death of Jesus divides history into AD and BC, the earthly life of Jesus divides the Old Testament from the New Testament. It initiates an entirely new season in the economy of God. In seeing God's plan, we also need to see the centrality of Jesus, his executive authority, and his divine administration.

This seeing is critical as it becomes the foundation for everything we are and do. This is seeing with the eyes of our hearts by the illumination of the Spirit rather than seeing with our natural eyes. It is not mere information intake into our cerebral cortex but a deepening of that information that is received into our limbic system by the power of the Spirit. This allows us to embrace the profound economy of God's design for the life and ministry of the local church. Hence, this must be done at the board, Church staff and ministry workers levels. Much like the central nervous system in the human body, this first stage coordinates information and executes adaptive actions throughout the body.

Early Methodists saw in Wesley's teaching and from scripture the ideal of Christian perfection (seeing God's plan), which became the first step towards their sincere introspective look at their own lives (discerning their contexts). This was the initial step that stirred many early Methodists towards energetically participating in class and band meetings and activities in order to close the gap between their experience and the ideal they sought. Similarly, this first step in the Church Health Pathway invites us to explore and understand the divine blueprint of renewal (from scripture and history) and the fundamental impulse that guides us in all our work as Christians. It's about aligning our vision with God's purpose and recognizing God's overarching plan that shapes our congregations' work. It helps us ground ourselves first in the grand story God is writing and how we have been invited to join. This is an important first step in our revitalization and health journey.

Key Texts: Discerning the metanarrative of scripture from Old and New Testaments; **Matt 6:22, Isaiah 6:1, Eph 1:10, Col 4:17, Acts 26:8-19, Eph 3:6-9, Matt 17:13-20.**

Key Idea: Ministry begins with proper seeing, seeing the economy of God. All our actions after this seeing become more about faithfulness than success.

Familiarize yourself with Key Concepts related to the Divine Economy & Church Health:

- Start with God's idea: Acknowledge that ministry commences with divine inspiration rather than human ideas.
- See the empty tomb. See what Jesus has already accomplished for us rather than trying to simply read our own weather. An empty tomb also means Jesus has conquered death, stirring faith for the entire journey of revitalization and renewal.
- Thoroughly examine the New Church Health definition: Review and analyze this working definition thoroughly and ensure that board members, staff, and volunteers know it and appreciate its implications for their work.
- Reexamine the Great Commission (**Matthew 28: 18-10; John 20:21; Acts 1:8**) and the Great Commandment texts again. This will ground our basic understanding of God's call for the church. As part of this journey, discover integral mission: Ministry that combines the proclamation of the gospel with acts of justice and compassion. When Christians fail to bring a healthy integration of the proclamation of the gospel with the demonstration of the gospel (in acts of justice and compassion) or ignore the command to love God and love our neighbour, too, we create a deadly duo of idolatry and oppression. The two sins of compromise littered in the history of Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church.
- Rediscover the "Gospel"- Almost all renewal movements in the history of the church began with a rediscovery of the significant tenets of the "Gospel." (Like the Reformation with Martin Luther and the Reformers, Wesley's Aldersgate experience, etc.)

- Understand the goal of the Christian life: Refer to ¶1600 Manual for insights (Link: <https://fmcic.ca/manual/chapter-6-the-christian-journey/%C2%B6600-the-goal-of-the-christian-journey/>). This helps us measure our success based on clear goals.
- Examine Wesley's Aldersgate experience and other narratives of Christian perfection in Early Methodism as a historical paradigm for the ways in which "seeing God's plan" leads to transformation of life. (See Richard P. Heitzenrater's "Great Expectations: Aldersgate and the Evidences of Genuine Christianity, in Aldersgate Reconsidered, ed, Randy L Maddox (Nashville: Kingswood, 1990), 49-91.
- Participate in activities that help staff, congregants or board members to remember recall pivotal moments of calling, whether collectively for the church or individually. This reflection serves as a reminder of God's call. If Wesley's call was deeply shaped by his Aldersgate heart-warming experience, his rescue from the burning parsonage where his father preached, and the Fetter Lane prayer incident⁵, what shaped our own calls?
- Board members, staff members & pastors must also familiarize themselves with the New Church Health Pathway. A preliminary introduction document introducing churches to this pathway will be available, followed by in-depth discussions with videos and tutorials.
- Become familiar with the FMCIC's overarching vision: Understand the connection between FMCIC's vision, church health and the values and vision of your local church.
- As part of "Discerning God's Plan," church boards and pastors would be encouraged to establish working definitions for "church," "discipleship," "gospel" and "evangelism," using scripture as a guide and the stories of early Methodism.
- Understand the biblical principles of selfless generosity and good financial stewardship (including tithing, etc). This allows the leaders to cultivate a vision for generosity as part of their discipleship plans and ideals.
- Pastors are to communicate the overarching story of God: Consider a special sermon series to share the metanarrative of redemption (with Christ at the centre) into which your church is invited.
- Engage in prayer and discernment: Hold dedicated moments for prayer and seeking God's vision during a board or ministry team retreat.

⁵ "Monday, January 1, 1739. Mr. Hall Kinchin, Ingram [George] Whitefield, Hutchings, and my brother Charles were present at our love feast in Fetter Lane, with about sixty of our brethren. At about three in the morning (3am), as we were continuing instant in prayer, the power of God came mightily upon us, in so much that many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground. As soon as we recovered a little from that awe and amazement at the presence of his majesty, we broke with one voice, " e praise thee, O God, we acknowledge thee to be Lord." (Letter of June 8, 1780. Letters (Telford), 6:21). This incident has been said to be the birthplace of Methodism.

- Emphasize spiritual sight: Recognize the spiritual dimension in ministry, focusing on seeing the administration of God and Christ at its centre.
- Understand Paul's teachings on 'divine economy': Grasp the concepts of divine administration and the "will of God" in Paul's epistles.
- As we see in our church health definition, we need to rediscover the power of the Holy Spirit in our work.
- Study and understand the "economy of God" from Scripture etc.

Discern Your Context

After '*Seeing God's Plan*,' the second phase in the process is '*Discerning Your Context*.' Every community is unique, and understanding our specific context is paramount. This step encourages us to analyze our church and its surroundings thoughtfully, acknowledging the diverse needs, challenges, and opportunities that exist. By discerning our context, we gain clarity on how to minister and thrive effectively in our specific communities and contexts. Armed with step one, our discernment at this stage is not merely navel-gazing but grounded in Scripture, Christ's and God's eternal economy. As I mentioned earlier, before we attempt to discern our context, we must seek God's plan. The goal of discerning the context is to align our context with God's economy by providing room for God in that context.

There is a crucial reason why seeing God's economy comes before or alongside discerning our context: A context that is not organically and intentionally connected to the divine economy is like a stagnant, festering lake with algae on its surface, in contrast to a river that is living and active, whose fountainhead is directly connected to the pure river of life flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb (**Rev 22**). While this lake becomes a breeding ground for death, the church, when connected to the divine economy, becomes a living spring that gives life to others. When stagnant water seeps into our church buildings, it causes toxins that lead to gangrene.⁶

The value of properly discerning context is not so we each choose our own paths forward but because God's economy makes room for diversity, being too vast and complex to be monotonous and sterile. Faithful contextualization is the only adequate channel through which His love and power can be expressed. Diversity is the multifaceted way His massive economy can be expressed.

⁶ Here is an illustrate story about toxins, theology and health: A year into his first pastorate, a church discovered major environmental dangers in its children's building, erected in the 1970s. Toxins were leaking into the groundwater, air quality was unhealthy, and it was at constant risk of flooding in the rainy Oregon climate. The church decided to demolish and rebuild the building. Dr. Swoboda, standing with his Pastor, watched the demolition. The building's materials were so poor that they were stripped away like papier-mâché. Surprised, Dr. Swoboda asked why it had been built so poorly; thirty-five years seemed a short lifespan for a building. The senior Pastor, over the sound of the bulldozer and half-jokingly, shouted, "...they thought Jesus would return in the next ten years."# That day, Dr. Swoboda learned that our theological convictions—for better or worse—shape our ecological landscape. Theology truly matters! A church that does not get its divine vision, theology or Concept of God right, risks breeding toxins, literally! This quote is taken from Rev. Jervis Djokoto's lecture notes from A.J. Swaboda, on January 25th 2021 during his Doctor of Ministry Class on Holy Spirit Leadership at Fuller Theological Seminary.

In **John 1:14**, the eternal Word became a mobile tent. This incarnation becomes the model for contextual ministry: the Word became flesh, by the Spirit of God overshadowing the womb of a virgin girl willing to say, "May it be done to me according to thy will." Until we are ready to say, "May it be done according to His will," we cannot host the Messiah. The Word existed before being born through the womb of willing parents. Mary did not create the baby, nor did Joseph supply the sperm; she believed and received the seed implanted by the Spirit. This is the model for true contextual ministry. In contextual ministry, we learn to receive seed from the Spirit to produce a ministry that is both earthly and heavenly. Contextual ministry is to be God and man simultaneously. It is Jesus as both God (book of John) and man (book of Luke), worker (book of Mark), and King (book of Matthew). The church is called to be all this and more in Jesus' name. As lions, we are to cast out devils, heal the sick, and more.

Opening ideas to consider:

- The Church is Christ's embodiment, and as the Spirit's temples, it houses and mediates the presence and power of the living God. At its pinnacle, the church mirrors Christ's likeness, embodying His essence and functioning as His organic body, with each member contributing to the whole. Just as Christ was conceived by the Spirit and empowered by the Spirit, so too should the church operate in the fullness of spiritual empowerment.
- In the pursuit of Church Health, your mission is to nurture your Church's *Body* (systems and structures in the church), *Soul* (the church's self-reflection in values, vision, and mission statements), and *Spirit* (nurturing pneumatic ecclesiology and allowing the Holy Spirit to move), ensuring a holistic approach to its vitality and mission. To achieve this, we must be intentional about discerning and addressing all these facets of church life.
- The essence of health within any organism lies in its ability to function optimally, both internally and in its interaction with the world. Consider the analogy of a woodcutter: its health is evident when its internal machinery operates flawlessly, seamlessly cutting wood as intended. Any deviation from this optimal function constitutes a malfunction, highlighting the importance of every part operating in harmony with its designed purpose. Think of your local church as an organism with every part operating optimally and in harmony with its designed purpose.
- Therefore, in your exploration, delve into the local church's purpose, nature, rhythm, and priorities, striving for alignment with its divine design. It's imperative that we confront the reality of our churches with honesty and specificity, akin to the approach of Nehemiah's friend, who candidly assessed the state of the people in Jerusalem and the deplorable state of the condition of the institution tasked with their protection (the walls of Jerusalem). In other words, just as Nehemiah focused on the people's distress and the state of the protective walls, our evaluation encompasses both the well-being of the congregation and the structural integrity of the church body with its systems. Only through this comprehensive understanding can we chart a path toward restoration and renewal.

- Therefore, let us thoroughly examine our churches, acknowledging both the strengths and weaknesses, as we endeavour to cultivate health and vitality in Jesus' name.
- An example of a helpful activity to undertake is a history wall activity/experience to recount and celebrate how God has been working through the history of the local church you're a part of. This will give you a hint of what God may have done and where He may want to take you in the coming years, too!

Below are key issues to consider in discerning your context:

I. Evaluate your Mission and Vision as a Local Church

- **Discern Local Church Vision:**
 - Clarify the core values guiding your ministry.
 - Revisit or establish the vision for your local church.
 - Ensure it harmonizes with the broader FM Church vision and the church health goals.
 - Use visual tools to make the vision easily understandable to the congregation.
- **Evaluate Mission Statements:**
 - Ensure alignment with the broader goals and values of the denomination.
 - Revisit your church's mission statement. Check if it accurately reflects the vision for a healthy church.
 - Use visual aids to depict the connection between vision and mission clearly.

II. Evaluate Your Systems as a Local Church

Just as the human body relies on various systems for optimal function, a local church operates through different systems. Strengthen these systems to ensure the smooth functioning of the church. Systems as ongoing processes saving **S**tress, **T**ime, **E**nergy, and **M**oney. These are vehicles for God's presence and the church's mission and vision.



Here are some key Systems for the Local Church:⁷

- **Worship Planning System**
 - Develop a clear & systematic approach to planning and conducting worship services.
- **Prayer System**
 - Establish a robust prayer system that underpins all church activities.
- **Evangelism System**
 - Implement effective strategies for reaching and welcoming new believers.
- **Assimilation System**
 - Create a process to integrate newcomers into the church community.
- **Small Groups System**
 - Encourage participation in small groups for fellowship and discipleship.
- **Ministry System**
 - Organize and support various ministries within the church.
- **Stewardship System**
 - Implement systems for responsible financial management, generosity and resource allocation.
- **Leadership System**
 - Develop leadership structures that empower and equip individuals for service.

III. Erect Pillars of Spiritual Renewal in Your Church

Pillars are essential for providing stability and support to a structure, and in the context of the Church, these pillars are erected on the unshakable foundation of Jesus Christ. To bring about revitalization, focus on the following key areas:

Clear Vision and Mission

- Define a compelling vision that aligns with the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.
- Establish a mission that reflects the purpose and calling of the church.
- Align ministry programming with the working definition of church health, ensuring that every aspect reflects and contributes to the overarching goal of revitalization.
- Align all church activities with the mission and vision.
- Engage in impactful mission work to serve the community.
- **Leadership and Direction**
 - Cultivate strong and servant-hearted leadership within the church. Servant leaders, in their service, empower others.
 - Provide clear direction for the church's growth and impact.
 - Practice humility, accountability and clear communication as leaders.

⁷ These systems were taken from Nelson Searcy. Nelson Searcy's system for evaluating church operations may be more relevant to larger churches with over 100 members, but it could also be helpful for smaller churches looking to establish more structured systems and operations.

- **Worship & Spirituality of the Church**

- Foster a worship culture that glorifies God and engages the congregation (at all ages and stages).
- Nurture the spiritual growth of individuals through meaningful spiritual practices.
- Allow the Holy Spirit and his gifts to be developed.

- **Community and Connection**

- Build a sense of authentic community among members.
- Facilitate spaces for meaningful connections to develop within and outside the church.

IV. Know Your Neighbourhood/Community

Community Understanding through **SPEC's** ⁸

God has called us to minister effectively to our surrounding neighbourhoods. Our commitment to being 'Within Reach' of all people in Canada signifies our dedication to making the Christian faith accessible to everyone. We envision a church that breaks down barriers and welcomes people from all walks of life, embracing diversity and multiculturalism. To know a community, we need to think about the SPECifications of that community. I've identified four key factors that help us understand people and communities well enough to minister effectively to them. This can also be used for individuals, church communities or entire neighbourhoods. Consider these four key factors:

- **Spirituality:** Explore the beliefs, affections, and practices that define the religious engagement of the church and people in its surrounding areas.
- **Personality:** Identify the personality profile of the individuals and the community, including demographic data such as gender and age range.
- **Experiences:** Uncover the stories, history, and background that have shaped the identity of the church and its members.
- **Culture/Ethos:** Pay attention to traditions, customs, and values that influence how the church functions and interacts with its surroundings.

V. Consider Using Other Discernment Tools

A. Utilize Questions in the Church Health Check-list

As part of discerning your context, it would be beneficial to utilize the questions in the Church Health Checklist. [The Church Health Checklist](#) was developed to help pastors, boards, and ministry leaders evaluate their church's health and ministry. Use the list to discuss and answer important questions, celebrate progress, and identify areas to work on. It's not a pass/fail tool but a way to evaluate and plan prayerfully. You could discuss this at the board level or in smaller groups, whatever works for you. Use it for a church health check-in or as part of a ministry plan. Contact your coach or the Church Health Department for help.

⁸ The SPEC's was a framework developed by Rev. Jervis Djokoto during his MDiv program at Tyndale Seminary to help him with community assessment work for his final thesis paper.

B. A Ministry Map

This is where we undertake a quick exercise to see what the church is doing and what is missing. A good church ministry has a rounded approach that focuses on introducing people to Jesus while maturing Christians.

Conclusion

By evaluating its mission and vision, addressing its systems, knowing its community's SPEC's, and engaging in honest conversations using the Church Health Checklist or NCD, your local Church can know where it stands and work towards revitalization and a more informed and impactful ministry. This process enables you to establish your revitalization goals. Remember, this doesn't have to be rushed, as it could take several months.

Close the Gap (Dream Up a Plan & Make the Shifts)

Armed with the insights from the first two steps, it's time to bridge the divide between our context and God's plan. Here, we are called to dream up a plan that aligns with God's overarching design and is tailored to our unique context. This step involves making intentional shifts and implementing practical changes that bring us closer to the vision set by God for our churches. Our Coaches and Church Health Department will also be available to help you along the way.

1. Identify the Significant Gaps in Fulfilling God's Plan in Your Church.

The initial step to becoming a healthy Church involves each local Church recognizing the gaps in their capacity to fulfill God's plan for them. As starters, here are a few identified gaps in the North American Church in their ability to fulfill the great commission. This is based on the State of the Great Commission report by the Lausanne Movement, which was released in 2024 and was the result of a five-year process.⁹

After significant global Gaps in the North American Church & the FMCiC

A. Secularization

The fastest growing religious group is the 'None/Unaffiliated' category. A striking 93 percent of those transitioning to this group are Christians, with estimates suggesting that 106 million will leave and 40 million will join from 2010 to 2050. At the forefront of the state of the Great Commission¹⁰ in North America is our transition away from a culturally dominant Christianity towards a post-Christian or secular society. In only the past two decades, the percentage of people who identified as Christians in Canada has declined by nearly a quarter to 53.3 percent in 2021. How can Christians from churches, parachurch organizations, and workplaces unite to engage and mentor the increasing number of people who identify as atheistic, agnostic, or 'nothing in particular'? Additionally, how can we effectively connect with secular individuals for whom God seems absent in their daily lives? What are the primary reasons behind the trend of shifting to unaffiliated beliefs, and what innovative approaches to disciple-making and community can help prevent this transition?

⁹ See <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tLa-g2VBq44n4c6codxcCdZnKwZjUoAK/view> for the State of the Great Commission Report by The Lausanne Movement 2024.

¹⁰ See <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tLa-g2VBq44n4c6codxcCdZnKwZjUoAK/view> for the State of the Great Commission Report by The Lausanne Movement 2024.

B. Discipleship in a Digital Age

The majority of the global population lives and works in a digital world. The digital realm is now an increasingly important source of community, knowledge, and identity formation. Thus, questions arise as to the role of digital technology in the act of discipleship: in developing wisdom, growing virtue, and cultivating fruitful Christians to make a difference in their everyday lives. There is a need to reimagine forming every person to follow the way of Jesus in their particular context, guarding against a virtual and disembodied faith while leaning into the new avenues of equipping everyone instantaneously in their time and place, sharing resources globally. Acknowledging the global digital turn and reflecting on the potentials and challenges of disciple-making and discipleship in a digital age, this conversation prayerfully explores:

C. The Next Generation (and the global aging population)

The global aging population (60 years and older) is the fastest-growing global population, increasing from 1 billion to 2.1 billion between now and 2050. Research and general observation have shown that emerging generations across the globe are less open to institutional expressions of the church and less dedicated to the Christian faith. As the most ethnically and socially diverse generation, Gen Z has been shaped by seismic social changes and technological advancements. The result is a demographic that often rejects the notion that "the growing permeation of digital spaces creates opportunities to empower the laity to reach their communities." The conventional norms define traditional religious life and approaches. Overall, youth culture differs significantly from previous generations due to advancements in technology, the search for authenticity, the desire for holistic well-being, and the longing for an integrated Monday-to-Sunday spirituality that spans life and work. Many in the next generation have not heard the gospel and lack close Christian companions to demonstrate the way of Jesus in this new culture. What are specific evangelism strategies for this age group? What are specific discipleship strategies for this age group?

2. Building A Comprehensive Plan for Church Revitalization

In the pursuit of revitalization, it is essential to bridge the gap between God's vision and our local church context. This section now begins to outline a long-term strategic plan divided into key areas to guide the church in this transformative journey. This is the point to develop a concrete plan that shapes the Lead Pastor's role and Board responsibilities in alignment with the discerned vision. This is the time for strategic planning: to develop tailored action plans based on the findings, ensuring a clear path for improvement. Reach out to us if you would like us to walk your board through crafting a ministry plan and vision.

3. Participate in training opportunities on Renewal and Revitalization: The FMCIC Church Health Department is moving towards helping churches cultivate an intentional culture of health and revitalization. To achieve this, the department will be hosting annual training cohorts and opportunities for pastors and lay leaders within the denomination to participate. Look out for announcements regarding this. In addition, during the listening tour conducted from June to October 2023, we discovered that several pastors who participated in Church Renewal International mentorship programs found them beneficial, enhancing their personal health and practices in tangible ways. Thus, we also recommend pastors contact Church Renewal and inquire about participation.¹¹

4. Engage the Shift:

Shifts in your ministry culture can take time, so be patient. However, it is important to recognize the key elements needed for the SHIFT you desire to actually occur. According to Wallas, “A revitalization movement is defined as a deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture.” However, consider the following things to ensure that this ongoing shift in your local church is grounded in God’s plan and eternal economy. The acronym **SHIFT** (Scripture, Holy Spirit, Intercession, Faith, Teachers/Coaches/Mentors) is the means by which your unique Context is effectively ministered to, fostering deep and complete change. These agents of change allow us to meet our goals and overcome limitations.

SHIFT Components:

A. **Scripture:** Consciously align and ground all your efforts towards revitalization in Scripture. That’s your surest foundation for true and lasting Change. Don’t be lured to implement a program because it is catchy or trendy.

B. **Holy Spirit:** Embrace the transformative work of the Holy Spirit for genuine change. Without the Spirit’s help, there can be no lasting transformation. Evaluate the freedom of the Holy Spirit within the church space.

C. **Intercession:** Integrate prayer and fasting into your ministry’s very fabric. Address spiritual attacks and demonic influences through restoration prayer. There are seasons of corporate prayer outside of regular church services.

D. **Faith:** Trust God with the future of your church, avoid hasty actions that leave God behind, and overcome your fears with faith grounded in the finished work of Christ for your health and vitality.

E. **Teachers/Coaches/Mentors:** Seek dialogue partners for guidance and support in the journey towards revitalization. Your regional Coaches and Church Health Department is here to guide you along the way.

CONCLUSION

See God’s Plan, Discern Your Context, and Close the Gap - this is not just a formula; it’s a dynamic roadmap for our churches to flourish, embracing God’s design in the ever-evolving landscapes of our Canadian context and beyond. The approach to achieving overall church health revolves around a continuous cycle that includes comprehending God’s plan, evaluating our context, and taking action to close the gap by creating and implementing necessary changes in partnership with the Holy Spirit. This process is meant to be ongoing, like a perpetual loop.

¹¹ You can reach out to Chris Puhach chrisp@churchrenewal.com for further enquiries.



Empowering Your Church to Walk Through the Process Towards a Sustainable Future

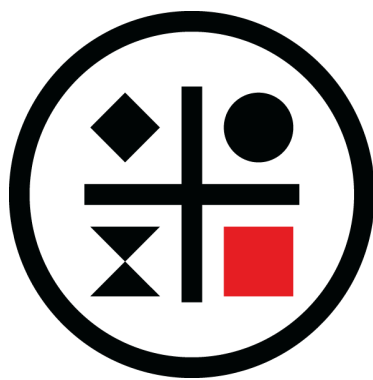
Our Commitment

We are excited to introduce a transformative initiative designed to guide your church through intentional steps toward growth, resilience, and sustained well-being. We are committed to partnering with you throughout this journey. Our goal is to identify areas for improvement and empower your church to create lasting change. Together, we will build a foundation for a vibrant and thriving community.

Over the next months and years, our goal is to produce a complete Church Health Pathway, which offers a comprehensive package to enhance church health through a structured process & program. This package would include a textbook for foundational learning, pilots at diverse churches for practical testing, a workbook integrated with instructional videos for in-depth understanding, a coach's guide for personalized support, graphics and flow diagrams for visual clarity, and a PowerPoint presentation for streamlined training sessions. The goal is to empower pastors and church leaders with the tools and knowledge necessary to implement effective strategies for sustained church growth and vitality.

For further information or to schedule the initial workshop, please contact the Senior Director of Church Health (email Admin Assistant: lorilee.bishop@fmcic.ca).

Thank you for entrusting us with the privilege of supporting your church's health journey.



**FREE
METHODIST
CHURCH
IN CANADA**