SMALL CHURCH TURNAROUND

Church Vital Signs Kit

An honest diagnosis in one evening

Ten signs of health your council scores together, using records your church already keeps.



Rev. Dr. Phillip M. Pledger

A free companion to the
Church Turnaround Course
SMALLCHURCHTURNAROUND.COM

WELCOME

How to use this kit

Most small churches never lay their own records side by side. The numbers sit in different binders, the decline is slow, and loyal members quietly cover the gap. This kit puts the whole picture on the table so your pastor and council can look at it together, in one evening, without blame.

Every page is taken straight from Chapter 1 of the *Church Turnaround Course*. Each one is a working tool your leaders fill in by hand.

Three steps

1. **Two weeks before.** Schedule the evening and assign the data gathering (kit pages 2 and 3).
2. **Before anyone sees the numbers.** Each leader fills in the Gut Check (page 1) on their own.
3. **The evening itself.** Follow the Leader's Guide (page 8): score the ten vital signs together, talk them through, and write a one-page summary with your next steps.

What's inside and what to print

1	**Gut Check**	Each leader, before seeing any numbers
2	**Data-Gathering Checklist**	Two weeks before the meeting
3	**Ten-Year Trend Table**	Filled in before the meeting
4	**Vital Signs Scorecard**	Scored together at the meeting
5	**Quick Calculations**	Percentages and financial runway
6	**Discussion Questions**	At the meeting
7	**Council Summary and Next Steps**	At the end of the meeting
8	**Leader's Guide: Agenda and Ground Rules**	For whoever leads the evening

Print one copy of pages 1, 4, 6 and 7 for each leader. The person leading the evening also needs pages 2, 3, 5 and 8.

> The worked examples on the Quick Calculations page use St. Mark's, the sample congregation followed through Chapter 1 of the course. Where a page mentions another chapter, it points to the full course.

> *"Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God" (Revelation 3:2).*

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CHAPTER 1 WORKBOOK · PAGE 1 Church: _____ Date: _____

Gut Check

Fill this in **on your own, before you see any numbers.** Don't look anything up. Your honest guess is the point. You'll compare it with the real numbers later tonight.

Our average Sunday worship attendance ten years ago was about

_____

Our average Sunday worship attendance today is about _____

Number of people on our membership roll today _____

Number of households that gave at least once last year _____

Adults who joined in the last three years and still attend _____

Share of our worshipers who are under age 50 _____

Share of our budget spent on the building _____

If we draw on reserves, years until the money runs out _____

Where do you believe our church is in its life cycle? Check one.

☐ **Birth**	☐ **Growth**	☐ **Plateau**	☐ **Decline**	☐ **Dying**
A new start with clear mission	New people keep arriving	Steady, comfortable, maintaining	Losing more than we gain	Small, aging, running out of money

In one sentence: how healthy is our church right now?

Later tonight: what surprised me most when I saw the real numbers?

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CHAPTER 1 WORKBOOK · PAGE 2 Church: _____ Date: _____

Data-Gathering Checklist

Assign each item two weeks before the meeting. Much of the ten-year history is in the annual statistical reports your church sends to its District, conference or denomination. Ask for those first. **Do not send the numbers out before the meeting.**

Done	What you need (each of the last 10 years unless noted)	Where it usually lives	Who usually has it	Assigned to
	Average weekly worship attendance (leave out Christmas and Easter)	Attendance register, annual reports	Secretary / office	
	Membership roll total	Church database, annual reports	Secretary / office	
	Adults who joined in the last 3 years, and how many still attend	Membership records, pastor's knowledge	Pastor	
	Losses each year: deaths, transfers out, removed from roll	Annual reports, pastor's records	Pastor / secretary	
	Estimated share of worshipers under 50 (today only)	Two or three leaders reviewing the attendance list	Pastor + 2 leaders	
	Children and youth present on a typical Sunday (today only)	Sunday school records, observation	Education leader	
	Number of households that gave at least once (counts only, no names)	Giving records	Financial secretary	
	Total giving	Annual financial reports	Treasurer	
	Total spending, and spending on the building (utilities, insurance, repairs, custodial, mortgage)	Budget and year-end reports	Treasurer	
	Reserves, savings and endowment balances; amount drawn each year for operations	Financial reports, investment statements	Treasurer	
	List of key roles and who holds them; how long each has served (today only)	Council minutes, church directory	Council chair	
	Non-members served in a typical month; mission giving (today only)	Ministry leaders, budget	Pastor / mission chair	

Where are the ten-year numbers gathered and brought on the night?

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CHAPTER 1 WORKBOOK · PAGE 3 Church: _____ Date: _____

Ten-Year Trend Table

One person fills this in before the meeting. At the meeting, walk through it one row at a time and ask, “What do you notice?”

Year											Change
Avg. worship attendance											
Membership roll											
Worshipers as % of members											
New adults joined											
Losses (deaths, moves, removed)											
Giving households											
Total giving ($)											
Total spending ($)											
Building costs ($)											
Building % of spending											
Drawn from reserves ($)											
Reserves at year end ($)											

Change column: subtract the oldest year from the newest, then divide by the oldest year. Example: attendance 142 ten years ago, 96 today. (96 − 142) ÷ 142 = −0.32, a 32% decline. Page 5 walks through each calculation.

What do we notice when we see all ten years side by side?

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CHAPTER 1 WORKBOOK · PAGE 4 Church: _____ Date: _____

Vital Signs Scorecard

Score each sign together. **If you fall on the line between two colors, choose the less comfortable one.** Circle G, Y or R.

Vital sign	Our number	Green	Yellow	Red	Score
1. Worship attendance, 10-yr change		Growing, or down under 10%	Down 10–25%	Down more than 25%	G Y R
2. Worshipers as % of members		50% or more	30–49%	Under 30%	G Y R
3. Worshipers under age 50		One third or more	15–33%	Under 15%	G Y R
4. New adults who stay, per year		5% of attendance or more	2–5%	Under 2%	G Y R
5. Children and youth		Most Sundays, with a ministry for them	Now and then	Almost never	G Y R
6. Giving households, 10-yr change		Steady or growing	Down 10–25%	Down more than 25%	G Y R
7. Building % of budget		Under 30%	30–45%	Over 45%	G Y R
8. Financial runway		Balanced; no draws on reserves	Drawing; more than 5 yrs left	5 years or less	G Y R
9. Leadership depth		New leaders in last 3 yrs; few hold several roles	Some new; small group carries most	Same group 10+ yrs; roles unfilled	G Y R
10. Community connection		Non-members served weekly	Occasional events	Members only	G Y R

Totals: Green _____ Yellow _____ Red _____

Mostly green (7+ greens, no red in signs 4, 8 or 9): healthy or on a plateau. Stay watchful. **Mixed** (several yellows, 3 or fewer reds): the turnaround window is wide open. Act now. **Mostly red** (4+ reds): urgent. Turnaround is still possible, but it must start now; also study Chapter 11 honestly.

Signs 4, 8 and 9 together (new people, runway, leadership): G Y R
Which one sign could we most realistically move up one color in the next year?

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Quick Calculations

Fill in the blanks. The worked example in grey is from St. Mark's, the illustration in Chapter 1.

A. Ten-year change (use for attendance and giving households)

(Today _____ − Ten years ago _____) ÷ Ten years ago _____ = _____ %

Example — St. Mark's attendance: (96 – 142) ÷ 142 = –0.32, a 32% decline

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B. Worshipers as a share of members

Avg. attendance _____ ÷ Membership roll _____ = _____ %

Example — St. Mark's: 96 ÷ 410 = 0.23, or 23%

C. New adults who stay, per year

New adults in 3 yrs still attending _____ ÷ 3 = _____ per year; ÷ Avg. attendance _____ = _____ %

Example — St. Mark's: 5 ÷ 3 = 1.7 per year; 1.7 ÷ 96 = 0.018, just under 2%

D. Building share of spending

Building costs $_____ ÷ Total spending $_____ = _____ %

Example — St. Mark's: $98,000 ÷ $188,000 = 0.52, or 52%

E. Financial runway

Reserves available $_____ ÷ Drawn per year $_____ = _____ years

Example — St. Mark's: $210,000 ÷ $38,000 = about 5½ years

F. The hidden gap in giving

Change in total giving _____ % vs. Change in giving households _____ %

Example — St. Mark's: total giving down 6%, giving households down 31%

Reading your runway: about five years is how long a genuine turnaround usually needs to show results. If your runway is shorter than that, the council should know it tonight. Every year of delay shortens it further.

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 Church: _____ Date: _____

Discussion Questions

Take about 25 minutes. Everyone speaks. Facts before fixes: no solutions tonight.

1. Compare your gut-check guesses (page 1) with the real numbers. Where were we furthest off? Why do you think that is?

2. Which single number surprised or troubled you most?

3. When did our decline really begin? What was happening in our church and community at that time?

4. What has been hiding our decline from us? (Slowness? Generous givers covering the gap? Full holiday services? Records kept in different places?)

5. What is genuinely strong and healthy in our church right now? Name at least three things.

6. Read Revelation 3:1–2 again. What “remains” in our church that God may be calling us to strengthen?

7. How do we feel right now? Go around the table: one word each.

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Council Summary and Next Steps

Complete together at the end of the evening. One person turns this into a one-page summary for the next meeting.

In two or three sentences, where our church stands today:

Life-cycle stage we agree on: **Birth** **Growth** **Plateau** **Decline** **Dying**
Scorecard totals: **Green** _____ **Yellow** _____ **Red** _____

The three numbers we will share with the congregation:

1.

2.

3.

Strengths we will name alongside them:

Next steps

Written summary of tonight drafted by	Due: _____
Next council meeting to continue this work	Date: _____
Pastor and council chair share results with congregation	Date: _____
Everyone reads Chapter 2 before	Date: _____

> **Closing prayer** *Lord, you know our church better than we do. Thank you for the courage to look honestly tonight. Wake us up, strengthen what remains, and show us the way forward. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

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Leader’s Guide: Agenda and Ground Rules

For the pastor or council chair leading the evening. Plan on two and a half hours.

Read the ground rules aloud and ask everyone to agree:

1. **Facts before fixes.** Tonight we only diagnose. No one proposes solutions.

2. **No blame.** We are not here to find fault with any pastor, member or committee, past or present.

3. **Individual giving stays private.** We look only at totals and counts.

4. **Everyone speaks.** The quietest person may see the most.

5. **Nothing is decided tonight.** We are building shared understanding, not taking a vote.

Time	Min.	What happens	Workbook
6:30	15	Devotion (Revelation 3:1–6) and prayer for honest eyes and hopeful hearts	—
6:45	15	Gut check: each person guesses privately, before seeing data	Page 1
7:00	40	The ten-year picture: one row at a time. “What do you notice?”	Page 3
7:40	10	Break	—
7:50	30	Score the vital signs together; choose the less comfortable color	Pages 4–5
8:20	25	Discussion questions; compare guesses with real numbers	Page 6
8:45	15	Summary, next steps and closing prayer	Page 7

When people react, you might say…

If someone says…	You might respond…
“Numbers aren’t everything.”	True. But these numbers are people. The shepherd counted his sheep (Luke 15:4).
“It’s the culture / the denomination.”	Those are real. Tonight we focus on what we can see and change.
“Then we should just close.”	Not tonight. A diagnosis is not a sentence. Every option comes later.
“Let’s start a new service!”	Hold on to that energy. Write it down. We’ll come back to it.
Silence	Wait. Then invite one word each about how people feel.

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AFTER YOUR EVENING

Where to go from here

Once your council agrees on where the church stands, the next question is *why*, and then *what you will do about it*. Those are the questions the rest of the course answers, one council meeting at a time.

The Church Turnaround Course

Twelve chapters that take your pastor and council from this honest diagnosis to a written plan for your first 100 days. Each chapter comes with workbook pages like the ones in this kit, a leader's guide for the meeting, and an online lesson.

2 The seven habits that quietly kill a church

3 Grief before growth

4 When the council only talks about the roof and the budget

5 The pastor can't do it alone, and shouldn't try

6 Gatekeepers and the family that really runs the church

7 Stopping the conflict that drives people out the back door

8 Who lives near your church now

9 Fixing the first ten minutes for visitors

10 The building is eating us alive

11 Merge, partner, replant, or close well

12 Your first 100 days

One purchase covers your whole leadership team, with a 30-day refund if it isn't a fit. Churches that join by December 31, 2026 pay a reduced founding price. See the course at **smallchurchturnaround.com**.

Want to talk it through first?

Book a free 20-minute fit call at **smallchurchturnaround.com**, or email **Phil@SmallChurchTurnaround.com**. I read every message myself.

Above all, pray as you go. Turnaround is God's work before it is ours.

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