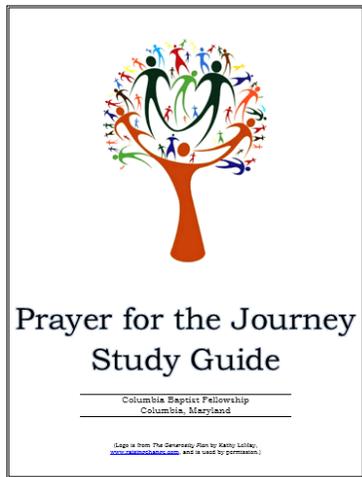


The plans for our Grand Fortieth Anniversary Celebration are coming together nicely, and it looks like all we need to make it perfect . . . is YOU! Reservations are needed by this Sunday in order to secure your place at the table for the banquet on Saturday night, April 6.

One of the fun parts about getting ready for the celebration has been my opportunity to invite our former pastors and interim pastors to the party. Each conversation has been delightful, and these leaders have been virtually unanimous in their affirmation that you have been the most fun congregation they've ever known, a conclusion to which I have also come!



It appears that several of our former pastors will be able to come (Jim Hamblen, Homer Carter, and Ron Mallow so far), and Jim Hamblen, our founding pastor, will be our preacher on Sunday, April 7. Quite a number of former members also plan to come, so **you don't want to miss this!**



On another subject, some of you will have noticed that there is quite a bit of material in our *Prayer for the Journey Study Guide* beyond what we'll be using in our Prayer Triplets. This bonus material is excerpted from George Bullard's manuscript, "Will Your Congregation Still Exist Ten Years from now?" and has been purchased for use within our congregation.

George is a church consultant with The Columbia Partnership (Columbia, SC), and his work underlies much that we are doing in our strategic planning processes. George actually identifies twenty-five factors that are predictors of congregational survival, congregational vitality, and congregational vibrancy, of which I have included twelve in the *Study Guide*. Here's the list of those twelve topics, after which I want to comment on one of them:

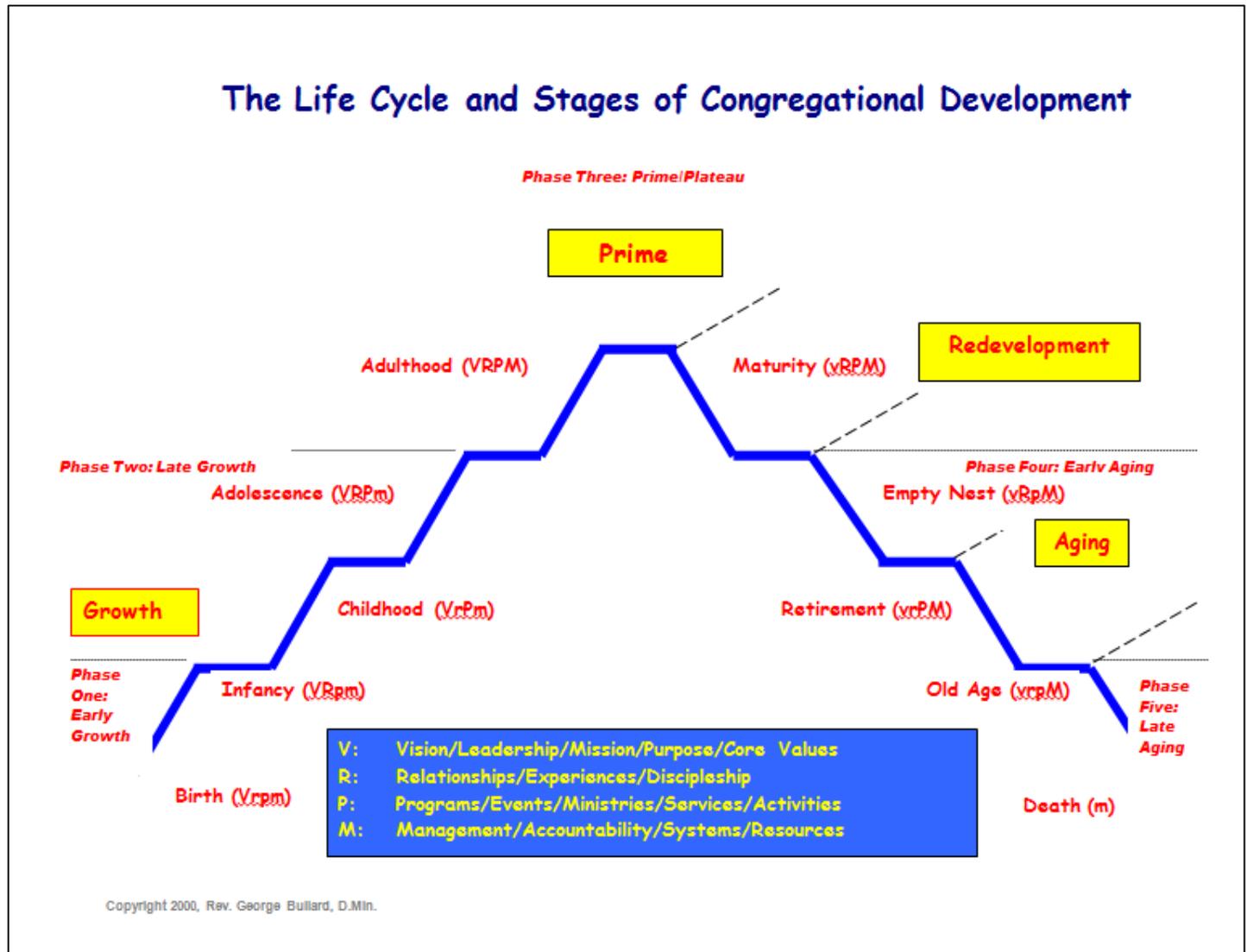
1. Your Congregation is More Likely to Exist Ten Years from Now if it has **Empowering Vision**.
2. Your Congregation is More Likely to Exist Ten Years from Now if it has **Shared Vision**.
3. Your Congregation is More Likely to Exist Ten Years from Now if it has **Empowering and Shared Leadership**.
4. Your Congregation is More Likely to Exist Ten Years from Now depending on **its Life-Cycle Stage**.
5. Your Congregation is More Likely to Exist Ten Years from Now if its **Congregational Efforts are Intentional**.
6. Your Congregation is More Likely to Exist Ten Years from Now if it has **Clear Core Values**.
7. Your Congregation is More Likely to Exist Ten Years from Now if it is **Obviously Christ-Centered**.
8. Your Congregation is More Likely to Exist Ten Years from Now if its **Relationships are about True Friendships**.
9. Your Congregation is More Likely to Exist Ten Years from Now if **at least Twenty Percent of Active Adults are Tithers**.
10. Your Congregation is More Likely to Exist Ten Years from Now if it is **Contextually Relevant**.
11. Your Congregation is More Likely to Exist Ten Years from Now if it has **Empowering Management**.
12. Your Congregation is More Likely to Exist Ten Years from Now if its **Worship is a True Encounter with God**.

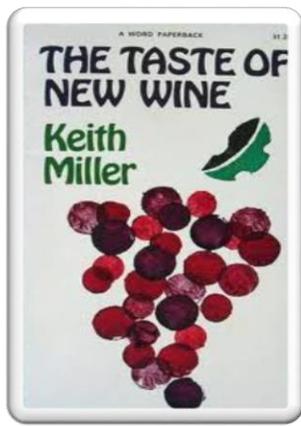
The factor to which I wish to invite your attention this week is the matter of congregational life-cycle. Many have noted that congregations, like other organizations, move through predictable

cycles of Childhood, Adolescence, Adulthood, Maturity, Empty Nest, Retirement, Old Age, and Death. Any given congregation is more likely to exist ten years from now if it is in the Childhood-Early Retirement stages of the congregational life-cycle. Congregational survival is uncertain in the Retirement, Birth, or Infancy stages, and unlikely in the stage of Old Age.

The key to understanding this diagram is the varying combination of the letters V,R, P, and M, where “**V**” represents vision, leadership, mission, purpose and clear core values; where “**R**” represents relationships, experience, and discipleship; where “**P**” represents programs, events, ministries, services, and activities; and where “**M**” represents management, accountability, systems, and resources. Capital letters represent primary functional values, and lower-case letters represent secondary functional values.

As you study this diagram, pay attention to the sequence of primary factors as it moves through the life-cycle from Vision in the birthing years to Management in the dying years, with the organization “firing on all cylinders” in its prime years. A key part of our self-assessment in this season of our congregational life is to determine where we currently are in this life-cycle. What might renewal, revival, and rekindling look like from here?





Finally, I want to include one more “installment” from my re-reading of *The Taste of New Wine*. Here are a few thoughts about the journey and process of discipleship . . . of becoming Christ-like:

“I have always pictured my inner life as a sort of cavern inside my head out of which I look at you, the rest of the world, through my eyes in the wall of the cavern. This cavern has a pool of liquid filling it about two-thirds full. The part above the surface of the pool is my conscious life and the larger part, beneath the surface where I cannot see, is my unconscious life. The day I decided to commit my life wholly to God, I scooped up everything I could see above the level of consciousness and offered it to Christ. I felt free; but then, several mornings later a hoary head came up out of the slimy pool, an old resentment.

“I was filled with discouragement and I thought I must not have really committed my life to God at all. But then I realized joyously that of course I had—that all [one] does when [committing one’s] ‘whole life’ is to commit that of which [we] are conscious” (pp. 56-57). [Note: It is for this reason that we pray with the psalmist, *Search me, God and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting* (Psalm 139:23-24).]

“Finally, I was afraid that if I really cut the cord of the anchor which was tied to my Self and began to venture forth in faith, God would send me to the mission field (which would of course mean Africa, India, or some remote place, since Christ said to be his witnesses to ‘the end of the earth’ [Acts 1:8]). But recently I have seen why it is that I have always thought of the ‘end of the earth’ as some far-off place. I now realize that it is because the *center* of the world has always been *wherever I am*. But where then is the end of the earth from *God’s* perspective?

“If the heart which beat in Jesus Christ was in any sense the heart which throbs at the center of the universe, then the ‘end of the earth’ from God’s perspective may be wherever the influence from that heartbeat stops—in your own home, your own business, your own congregation. So it may be that Christ is calling those of us who have tasted of His new wine to stay at home, right where we are, and be wholly His people there. And perhaps for the first time in our lives we will find that we have truly . . . come Home” (p. 116).

It is joy to me to be at Home with you!

Dave