

# WHY IS THE VISION PROJECT NECESSARY?



**THE VISION PROJECT** **BELONG  
BECOME  
BEYOND**

## WHY IS ALL THIS NECESSARY?

The external environment has changed significantly over the last 35 years.

- An increasing percentage of people claim no religious affiliation.
- A decreasing percentage of Christians find church membership and attendance necessary or important.
- A decreasing percentage of church members prioritize church involvement and regularly attend church.
- Affiliation with mainline denominations is decreasing.
- A decreasing number view church as the central social hub for their families.
- Religious and social diversity are increasing, while tolerance is decreasing.

## WHY IS ALL THIS NECESSARY?

With all these cultural and societal changes, **doing what we have always done** will no longer keep our church healthy and growing.

**Responding to our external environment** in ways that keep us relevant and healthy, yet are spiritually sound and consistent with our values, **is not just a “well, maybe” for “when we have time.” It is an ongoing process that is critical to our, or any organization’s, long-term survival.**

## WHY IS ALL THIS NECESSARY?

Erin's **internal environment** has also changed over the last three decades, and these changes require a prayerful, strategic response.

- Our congregation is aging and decreasing in age diversity.
- Our membership and, consequently, our financial base are decreasing.
- Fewer members are engaged in spiritual growth opportunities.
- Fewer members are involved in the church beyond attending worship.
- Fewer members prioritize involvement with ministry and support teams.
- Members who are involved in ministry and support teams are burning out.
- Leadership roles are increasingly difficult to fill.

## WHY IS ALL THIS NECESSARY?

Other **internal changes** make developing and implementing strategies critical if we are to thrive as God intends.

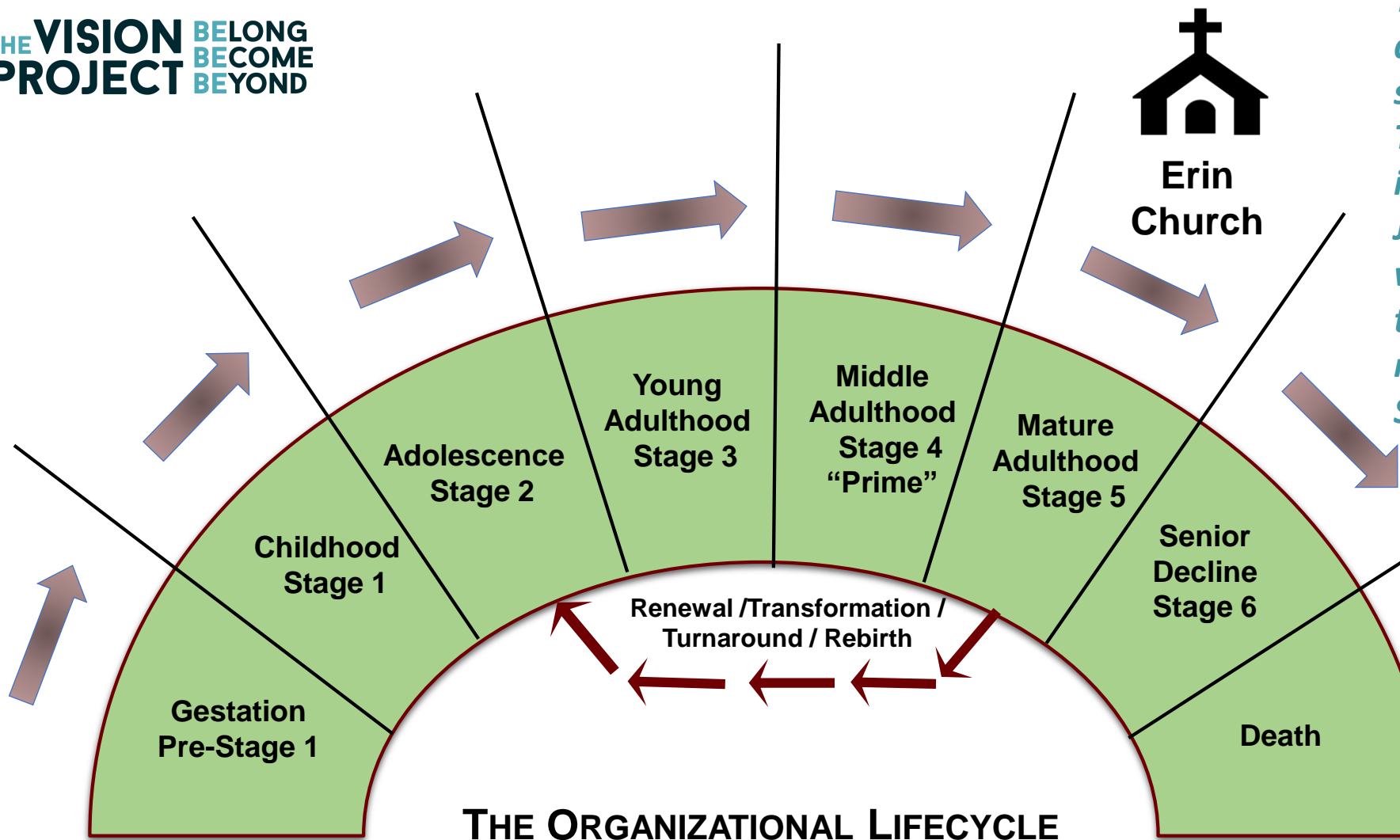
- Session has focused more on day-to-day operations, not long-term planning.
- Church practices that worked 25 years ago no longer meet the need.
- We have less impact on the surrounding community.
- Fewer visitors attend worship, and visitor follow-up is inconsistent.
- Our pastor is nearing retirement age, and we should prepare for this critical time by strengthening our congregation.
- We have moved from Adult to Mature Adult in our **organizational lifecycle**.

## WHAT IS A LIFECYCLE STAGE?

Organizations, like people, go through **developmental stages** from birth to death. However, **unlike people, organizations can reinvent themselves** multiple times and continue to live for hundreds of years.

Knowing the developmental stage of the organization is important because, like people, **there is developmental work to do at each stage.**

**Doing the work appropriate for each stage is important to the organization's quality of life and viability.** Delayed development or early development can both have negative impacts on the organization.



*The current reality described in the previous slides puts Erin in Stage 5. Transformation or rebirth is necessary and critical. Just tweaking a few things will not be enough for the transformation we need to move from Stage 5 back to Stage 2.*

## WHY DOES OUR LIFECYCLE STAGE MATTER?

Some organizations monitor their external environments and adjust internally to stay aligned with current realities. This monitoring also lets them know when adjusting will likely stop working and real transformation will be necessary if they are to continue to thrive.

Ideally, the decision to transform is made during Stage 4, the organization's prime, when resources are most plentiful and changes are least costly and difficult.



## WHY DOES OUR LIFECYCLE STAGE MATTER?

Because of limited staff, heavy reliance on volunteers, and lack of awareness, churches don't usually monitor their environment very well. Leadership tends to focus on the urgent: day-to-day operations. Developing strategy and planning for the future gets lost.

Churches usually move into “mature adulthood” on the down side of the lifecycle without understanding what is happening. At this stage, resources for change are less plentiful and changes are more costly and difficult. When resources are tight, reaching people outside the church is viewed as a lower priority than keeping members happy because maintaining membership and financial giving is critical.

## WHAT IS A BALANCED ORGANIZATION?

All non-profits, including churches, function on three levels supported by funding. At each stage of its lifecycle, the organization must balance these functions. Gaining this balance is important for Erin.



## WHAT DOES OUR RESEARCH TELL US?

- Church members today are over-committed with responsibilities to family, workplace, and community, which they prioritize over church.
- Programs and events churches sponsor for adults and youth are now offered by secular groups or are free online, making church offerings less attractive or even unnecessary.
- Parents can choose from a wide variety of quality programs and events for their children, making it harder for congregations to compete.
- Programs and events that do attract adults, youth, and parents are those they cannot get elsewhere: faith building, relationship building, and hands-on mission work.

## WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH TELL US?

*Even though the external environment for all churches has changed over the last three decades, studies show that some churches are growing. **Growing churches deliberately and intentionally focus on:***

- Incorporating newcomers into the congregation with systematic and well-developed processes attended to and supported by the entire congregation.
- Being spiritually vital and alive in ways that are apparent to the community and to those who come in contact with individual church members.
- Actively caring for and supporting individual members by meeting their needs directly and consistently.

## WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH TELL US?

Growing churches ***deliberately and intentionally*** focus on:

- Being open and ready to meet new challenges presented by the external environment and internal needs.
- Being open to technology, social media, and alternative, non-traditional methods for teaching and reaching out.
- Showing God's love in ways that speak to community members who are hurting and feel devalued.

## OUR CONCLUSION:

Successful congregations in the 21st century will not be about bigger and better programs.

*They will focus on deepening faith, building community, and engaging in hands-on mission work to share God's love.*



**Also check out:**

**WHAT DO OUR STRATEGIES MEAN?**

[erinpres.org/thevisionproject](http://erinpres.org/thevisionproject)

**Coming in June:**

**WHAT CHANGES ARE NEEDED TO IMPLEMENT THE STRATEGIES?**

**Be informed!**

**Read all about the Vision Project on Erin's website, and join us for muffins and coffee and a live presentation where you can ask questions before worship on June 9, June 30, July 21, or August 4 from 9:30 to 10:45.**