

Spirit Signs of Decline

Lack of mission and vision

Inward focus: conversation focuses on survival

Creative leaders begin to exit the system, sometimes in a burned-out condition.

New members needed to maintain and provide for old members

Focused on the past, not the future

Difficulty recruiting members to session or participation in ministry

Expecting/Waiting for pastor to come and save

Christian education attendance declines or is dropped altogether

Greater incidence of congregational conflict, malaise, depression, blaming, scapegoating, anger, and withdrawal

The community has changed its ethnic, racial or socioeconomic makeup, but the church has not.

Members are intensely preference-driven in their concerns about music worship style, programs, schedules, and the facilities

Any type of change is met with fierce resistance.

Ritual activities are repeated without generating any spiritual energy.

Outside of close personal relationships (“we’re a family”), no one can say why the congregation exists.

Numerical Signs of Decline

Steepening declines in membership and worship participation

Expenses consistently exceed income

Even if donations are stable, they come from fewer people

Money goes to building and maintenance, while programs are cut; or maintenance is deferred

Membership includes only one or two aging generational groups

Few professions of faith and baptisms take place

Pastors’ salaries are cut, or pastoral service is reduced from full-time to part-time

Denominational mission funds or per capita are not fully supported