

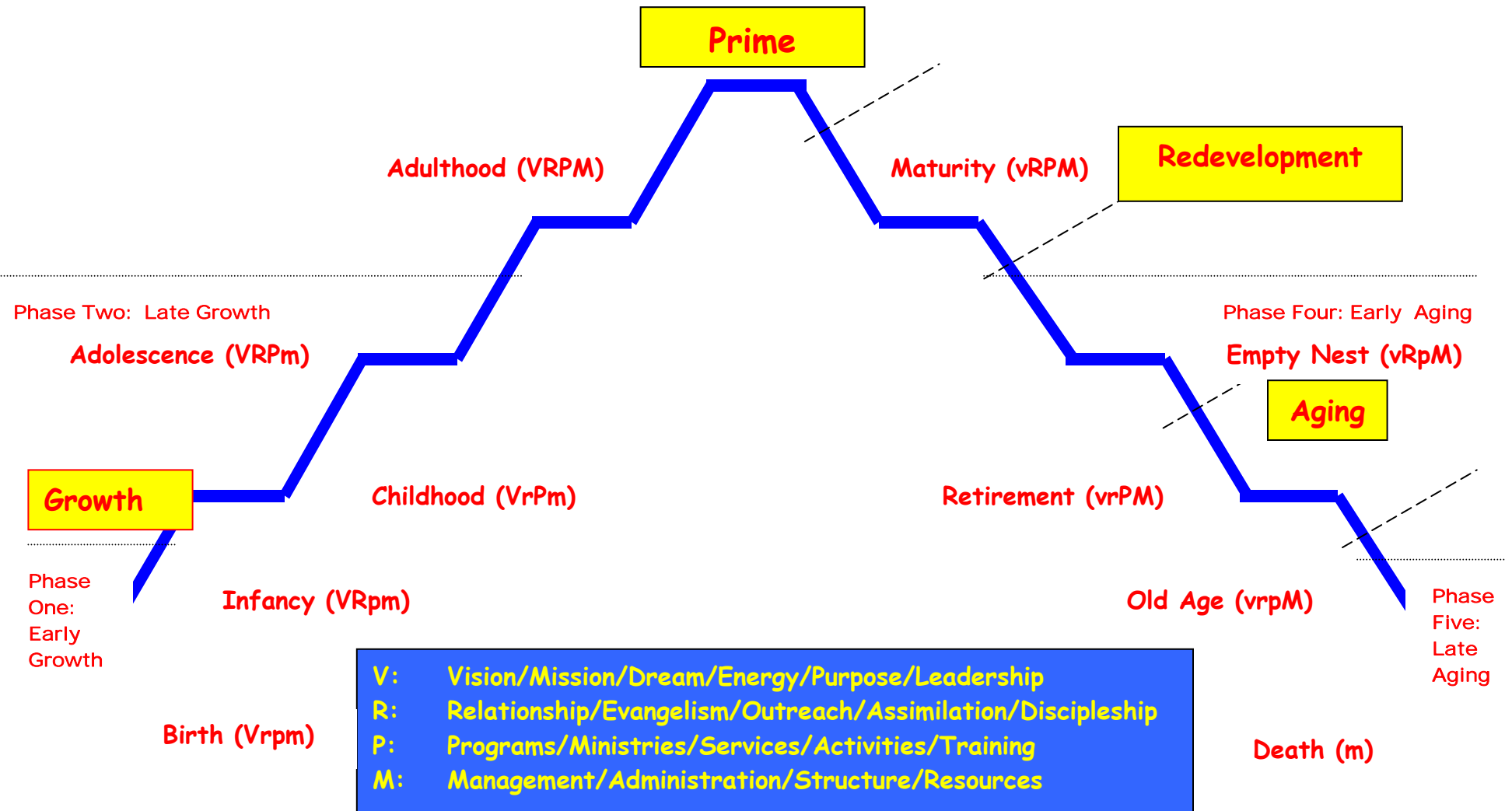


THE 'LIFE CYCLE'  
MODEL  
ASSESSMENT TOOL 

*... how old are you?*

# The Life Cycle and Stages of Congregational Development

Phase Three: Prime/Plateau



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# THE LIFE CYCLE

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The following pages are taken out of the **Spiritual Strategic Journey: Tutorial for Congregational Redevelopment** ([www.ssitutorial.org](http://www.ssitutorial.org)) pages 13-21.

The Life Cycle tool allows churches/leaders to not only determine but also understand their stage of church development.

## Choose Your Route

The best Route for your congregation's Journey is determined by its Life Cycle Stage.

Review "**Life Cycle and Stages of Congregational Development**" (below) and select the stage that seems most appropriate to your congregation's reality.

Once you've determined your congregation's life stage, discover the most appropriate corresponding route.

## Choose Your Route: Life Cycle and Stages

Gestation is a preparatory phase before the launching of a new congregation. Gestation is that period of time, often six months to two years in length, when preparations are being made to publicly launch a new congregation.

This involves spiritual preparation, vision casting, ministry planning, formation of a leadership core, and resource development.

Following gestation are the ten stages of congregational development that fit into a life cycle approach to congregations.

## The Ten Stages of Congregational Development

Here are the ten stages, beginning with "Birth" and extending through "Adulthood" and "Maturity" into "Old Age" and "Death."

After exploring these stages, determine your congregation's place on the life cycle and discover the most appropriate corresponding route.

### The Ten Stages: Birth

Birth is the first six months to two years of the public life of a congregation.

The Birth stage is driven by the expression of a passionate God-given *Vision* concerning the life of the newly emerging congregation.

*Relationships*, *Programs*, and *Management* activities are happening, but they are not fully developed at this stage.

Leadership is expressed through vision, and assists in fueling the forward progress of the congregation.

### The Ten Stages: Infancy

Infancy is the three to five years following the Birth stage when *Vision* and *Relationships* are dominant.

The expression of discipleship patterns that focus on worship, spiritual development, and the formation of warm and rich relationship patterns or a sense of true community in the congregation characterize infancy.

During Infancy the passion of the congregation to fulfill its vision will increase as people discover their role in this exciting spiritual and strategic journey.

Out of this passion people readily volunteer to do the work of the congregation because their congregation has the character of a movement they very much want to enhance and empower.

Healthy patterns of worship, evangelism, discipleship, leadership development, and ministry and missions are established during this stage.

## **The Ten Stages: Childhood**

Childhood usually begins around five to six years after the Birth of a congregation, lasts for five to six years, and focuses on *Vision* and *Programs*.

Childhood is initiated by the realization that the congregation is succeeding, but that its programs, ministries, and activities are unorganized and not developed in a form that will allow the congregation to reach its full kingdom potential.

The energy that was going into the development of deep, meaningful *Relationships* is now focused on developing and implementing the Programs structure for the congregation.

## **The Ten Stages: Adolescence**

Adolescence begins around 10 to 12 years after the public launching of the congregation, and is a stage where *Vision*, *Relationships*, and *Programs* are all emphasized.

It is often a time of a great crescendo of qualitative and quantitative growth.

The congregation is able to relax following five to six years of program development and implementation. People can enjoy their relationship with God and one another.

It is also a time of some chaos as people begin to multiply the dreams they have for the future of the congregation, and the core dream or vision of the congregation may appear fuzzy.

The longer Adolescence lasts, the more the congregation begins to realize they must address the *Management* systems of the congregation.

## **The Ten Stages: Adulthood**

Around 18 to 22 years after the public launching of the congregation, it reaches Adulthood when all four organizing principles—*Vision*, *Relationships*, *Programs*, and *Management*—are all fully developed.

The congregation is ready to soar as a fully development spiritual community with great resources and the proper balance or alignment of these resources.

Often, however, congregations do not soar because of one or both of the following reasons:

First, their fantasy of what it would feel and look like when they arrived at Adulthood does not match what they see. So, they are waiting for something else to happen.

Second, they may feel that what they have done is enough, and they may relax and begin to become complacent about their spiritual and strategic journey.

## The Ten Stages: Maturity

When congregations are around 22 to 27 years old, or approximately a generation from their Birth, they slip without much notice from Adulthood to Maturity.

Maturity is when *Vision* is no longer dominant or fully developed. The congregation is no longer living out the vision that God has given them. They are, instead, living out the patterns of *Relationships, Programs, and Management* they have developed.

Without the fueling and driving aspects of *Vision*, the congregation is being motivated by *Management*.

At the same time, Maturity may be a very high quality stage in the life of the congregation. There continues to be a crescendo of quality, even if *Vision* is diminished.

Often congregations will plateau numerically during Maturity.

Maturity represents the first stage when a congregation could redevelop or transform and move forward to a new partial life cycle.

## The Ten Stages: Empty Nest

If a congregation does not redevelop during Maturity it will move on to the Empty Nest stage.

Empty Nest is when *Vision* and *Programs* are no longer dominant or fully developed. The congregation is experiencing disintegration of the quality and quantity of programs, ministries, and activities.

*Management* is driving the direction of the congregation.

*Relationships*, while still vital, are turning increasingly inward in their focus.

Empty Nest has three phases.

**Phase one** is characterized by nostalgia that carries with it a hope that tomorrow will bring the return of yesterday. Most stories are about the glories of the past and not the anticipation of the future.

**Phase two** is characterized by disappointment that triggers a renewed call for commitment by the faithful core. Overachieving persons demand that everyone be as committed as they are to the redevelopment of the congregation.

**Phase three** is characterized by anger that results in a pattern of blaming. Often blaming focuses on the leadership of the congregation, even the pastor.

Empty Nest represents what can turn out to be the angriest stage of the life cycle for a congregation.

## The Ten Stages: Retirement

If a congregation does not redevelop during Empty Nest it will move on to the Retirement stage.

Retirement is when *Vision* and *Relationships* are no longer dominant or fully developed.

*Management* is driving the direction of the congregation.

*Programs* are once again dominant as congregations seek to revitalize their programs, ministries and activities.

## The Ten Stages: Old Age

If a congregation does not redevelop during Retirement it will move on to the Old Age stage.

Old Age is when *Vision, Relationships, and Programs* are no longer dominant or fully developed.

*Management* is the only factor that is still dominant or fully developed. As such the habit or pattern, generally at a mediocre level, drives the direction of the congregation.

### **The Ten Stages: Death**

If a congregation never redevelops, then it will die. Death is where a congregation ceases functioning as a Christ-centric faith community with regular worship, discipleship, and fellowship activities.

## Choose Your Route: Your Congregation's Place on the Life Cycle

To determine your congregation's place on the life cycle, gather a representative group of adults from your congregation and ask them to individually answer the following questions on a prepared written form:

- At what stage of the life cycle is your congregation today?
- What is the evidence of this stage?
- Describe the characteristics of Vision in your congregation.
- Describe the characteristics of Relationships in your congregation.
- Describe the characteristics of Programs in your congregation.
- Describe the characteristics of Management in your congregation

Then have small group and large group dialogue concerning their answers to these questions.

Generally a majority of the participants will choose one of the ten stages as the one that best represents the congregation's current location on the life cycle.

One exception that often occurs is when a congregation is in the Retirement stage. At times, some persons—who are at least 60 years old, for whom it has been at least 40 years since they first joined or connected with a congregation, and who have been a member or connected with this congregation for at least 20 years—will declare that the congregation is in Maturity. But persons who do not share all three of these characteristics are more likely to say the congregation is in Retirement. If there is a large group affirming each of these two stages, it is likely the congregation is in Retirement.

Seek to develop a consensus as to the life cycle stage of your congregation that is most passionately held by the largest number of people.

## Choose Your Route: The Route Corresponding to Your Life Cycle Stage

Select the route that corresponds with your congregation's Life Cycle Stage:

<b>Life Stage</b>	<b>Change process</b>	<b>Method Of Change</b>
Birth →	<b>Experiential or Vision/Values</b>	<b>Coaching</b>
Infancy →	<b>Experiential</b>	<b>Coaching</b>
Childhood →	<b>Systemic</b>	<b>Coaching</b>
Adolescence →	<b>Vision/Values</b>	<b>Coaching</b>
Adulthood →	<b>Systemic</b>	<b>Coaching</b>
Maturity →	<b>Incremental or Vision/Values</b>	<b>Revisioning</b>
Empty Nest →	<b>Incremental</b>	<b>Revitalizing</b>
Retirement →	<b>Experiential</b>	<b>Renewing</b>
Old Age →	<b>Systemic</b>	<b>Reinvention</b>
Death →	<b>Vision/Values or Experiential</b>	<b>Resurrection</b>

## Routings for the Journey

Routes for a congregational redevelopment journey can follow any of the following four models: incremental; systemic; vision/values; or experiential. An overview of the equipping order for each route is given below:

<b>Incremental</b>	<b>Systemic</b>	<b>Vision/Values</b>	<b>Experiential</b>
Present Planning	Readiness	Readiness	Learning
Implementation	Learning	Learning	Implementation
Evaluation	Assessment	Future Planning	Evaluation
Readiness	Future Planning	Implementation	Readiness
Learning	Present Planning	Assessment	Present Planning
Assessment	Implementation	Present Planning	Assessment
Future Planning	Evaluation	Evaluation	Future Planning

## Congregational Redevelopment Transitional Passages and Change Pathways

Stage	Process Theme	Rate of Transition and Change	Time Frame	Destination
Maturity	ReVisioning	Continuous	6-18 months	Adulthood
Empty Nest	Revitalization	Continuous	18-36 months	Adulthood
Empty Nest	Revitalization	Discontinuous	18-36 months	Adolescence
Retirement	Renewal	Discontinuous	3-5 years	Adolescence
Retirement	Renewal	Radical	3-5 years	Childhood
Old Age	Reinvent	Discontinuous	18-36 months	Childhood
Old Age	Reinvent	Radical	18-36 months	Infancy
Death	Resurrection	Radical	6-18 months	Birth