

## MODEL 5: LIFE CYCLE OF ORGANIZATIONS

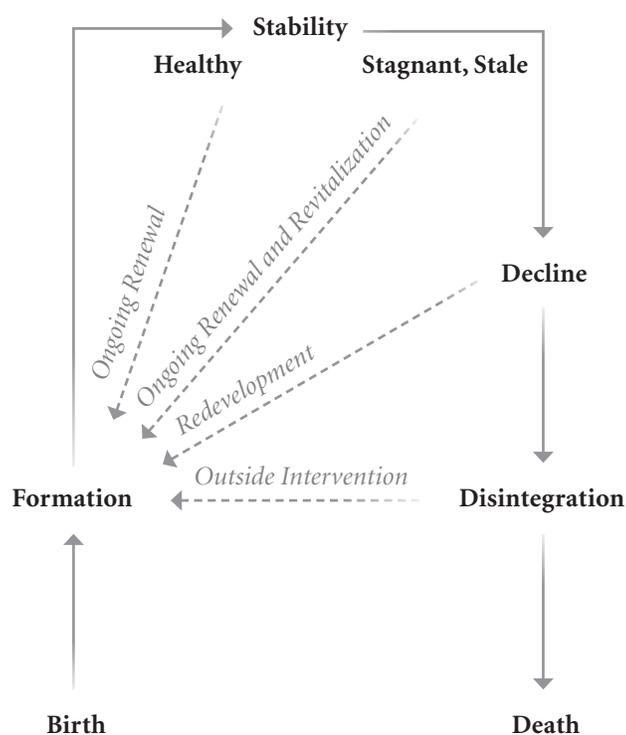


FIGURE 14: MODEL 5—LIFE CYCLE OF ORGANIZATIONS

**Birth:** A founder or founders, an idea, a dream

**Formation:** Identity—who are we (at the faith level)? what are we here for? who is our neighbor, and how are we related to our neighbor?

**Stability:** Fruitful and sustainable ministry, institutionally and spiritually. A time when the elements of organizational life fit together (money, vision for ministry, property, people). Stability can be a **place of health** or can tip into feeling **stagnant or stale**, with growth stalling and new opportunities being ignored. This tip is sometimes experienced as a membership plateau followed by declining numbers.

**Decline:** Characterized by a fall-off in numbers; decline in energy; fear, blame, and confusion in the system; a focus on small things rather than central issues

**Disintegration:** Marked by conflict, hopelessness, feeling stuck, inability of internal leaders to affect change

—Adapted from Alice Mann’s *Can Our Church Live? Redeveloping Congregations in Decline*

## Congregational Renewal and Redevelopment

*“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” —John 12:23–24*

### Healthy Stability and Ongoing Renewal

Healthy, stable congregations stay healthy either through leadership that instinctively raises and acts on formation-related questions in the overall congregation or through processes that continue to renew the entire congregation or important parts of the congregation that need attention. Some leaders organically recognize and act on areas in a congregation that need improvement; some leaders and congregations have in place processes that scan the life of the congregation and listen for and act on areas that need improvement.

### Stale, Stagnant Stability and Renewal/Revitalization

When stability becomes stale and stagnant, the necessary work for renewal and revitalization is typically system-wide. A congregation and its leadership will need to look in a more focused way at formation questions of identity, purpose, and context—Who are we? What are we here for? Who is our neighbor? When done skillfully, these interventions also introduce and teach the congregation language and models or frameworks that help to focus the discussion. Sometimes the self-study before the calling of a new vicar/rector can be the context within which at least some of this work is done.

### Decline and Redevelopment

The further down the path a congregation goes in declining numbers, finances, energy, and flexibility, the more costly it becomes for a congregation to engage the formation questions that have the potential to activate what it will take to return to healthy stability. Redevelopment is a possibility when serious declines have occurred in a congregation, but significant effort will be needed to increase the likelihood that redevelopment efforts will bear fruit. Often third-party help or a dramatic change in leadership is needed to face the situation, to let go of old patterns and ways of doing things, and to engage the work needed to turn things around.

### Disintegration and Outside Intervention

When disintegration begins and things start to fall apart, conflict or paralysis can set in. At this point, a diocese will often intervene, taking charge of the decisions since the congregation has no internal capacity to do what may be needed.