



THE IOWA FRIEND

Church Vitality: Navigating Decline and Embracing Renewal

BY: MANNY GARCIA

I recently read an article discussing the stages of closing a church, a sobering yet necessary study of end-of-life processes. However, within the article, I noted several key insights applicable not only to closing churches but also to churches who are experiencing decline and seeking a strategic “pivot” before towards revitalization.

First, let me be clear; not all churches should remain open. Like our physical bodies, churches progress through a lifecycle of birth, maturity, aging, and eventual passing. This cycle varies; some churches thrive for centuries, while others experience premature decline. Discernment is crucial in evaluating struggling churches, ensuring our resources are not misdirected towards prolonging the inevitable for the sake of our own comfort.

While some churches may require a peaceful closure, others are merely experiencing a period of poor health. Consider a 45-year-old seeking medical attention after years of neglecting their well-being. A physician would not deliver a death sentence but rather prescribe lifestyle changes. Similarly, we must not mistake decline for terminal illness in churches. Prayerful and thorough evaluation is essential. Just as it is detrimental to prolong a dying church, it is equally tragic to neglect a sick church that could be restored with strategic intervention.

So, what constitutes a “new diet and exercise” for a church? Each church, like each individual, has unique needs and capabilities. Herein lies the value of the Stages of Change Model, originally applied to church closures but equally relevant to revitalization.

Here are the stages applied to a declining church:

1. Pre-Contemplation: Leaders are unaware or dismissive of the consequences of inaction. Change is met with defensiveness and denial.
2. Contemplation: Leaders acknowledge the decline but lack solutions.
3. Preparation: Leaders prayerfully identify areas for change and set SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-Bound).
4. Action: Leaders implement strategic plans, embracing new approaches.
5. Maintenance: Leaders evaluate changes, adapting as needed.
6. Setback: Leaders navigate resistance and emotional responses to change, remaining steadfast in their vision.

Change is hard, and it brings up all sorts of feelings. To manage it wisely, those in leadership need to walk alongside people through those feelings, while keeping our eyes on revitalization. You know that saying, ‘If you always do what you’ve always done...’? That’s where a lot of struggling churches find themselves, doing the same things and hoping that someday the results change. But we need to try new things to see new life. It’s not easy, and it takes a lot of prayer and a steady commitment. There will be pushback, for sure. But, like Tony Robbins said, “Change happens when the pain of staying the same is greater than the pain of change.” And sometimes, that pain comes when we’re staring down the barrel of losing a church too soon. If your church is experiencing the challenges described above, we encourage you to connect with the Yearly Meeting office. We’re here to partner with you, providing access to resources and teams dedicated to guiding you through the revitalization process. This is a tangible example of how our One Church vision serves and strengthens our community.

2025

SPRING BODY

AND LEADER'S WORKSHOP

MARCH 21-22

Earlham Friends Church &
Bear Creek Friends Church

SCHEDULE

Friday

- 4:00-5:00PM: Hotel Check-in.
- Dinner: On your own.
- 7:00 PM: Workshop Session One, followed by a Q&A, at Earlham Friends.

Saturday

- 8:15 AM Breakfast provided by Earlham.
- 9:00 AM: Workshop Sessions Two & Three, at Earlham Friends.
- 12:30 PM: Lunch, at Bear Creek Friends.
 - A free-will offering will be collected.
- 1:30 PM: General Body Business.



SEE YOU IN

09

DAYS!

IOWA YEARLY MEETING

MINISTRY CONFERENCE 2025

SAVE THE DATE

July 24-27, 2025

REGISTRATION OPENS MAY 1ST!

BE SURE TO GET YOUR CHURCH READY FOR MINISTRY
CONFERENCE REGISTRATION SUNDAY ON MAY 25TH!

ABIDE & ABOUND



THE LORD ANSWERED, "I WILL BE WITH YOU . . ."

~JUDGES 6:16



EASTER MISSIONS OFFERING 2025

The IAYM Mission Board has chosen Friends Lugulu Mission Hospital in Kenya to receive our annual Easter Offering. The African hospital was established by Quaker mission workers in 1913. With 110 beds, it provides emergency, medical, and surgical services in a densely populated region where resources are scarce. Care is offered with compassion to all patients. Friends Hospital treats the body, mind, and spirit. Chaplaincy services include spiritual and mental health care, devotionals, prayer and counsel with patients & their families. The hospital delivers 2,000 babies yearly and more space is needed to provide care for them.

Friends Lugulu Mission Hospital has been impacted by the suspension of American foreign aid. The hospital is supported by Catholic Charities and CHAK (Christian Health Association of Kenya). Both receive funding from U.S. foreign aid programs. The Comprehensive Care Clinic (CCC), supported by Catholic Charities through U.S. foreign aid, employs dedicated staff members who provide life-saving medical services and counseling to patients diagnosed with HIV and tuberculosis. The clinic also runs essential programs to mitigate malaria in the region. The enforcement of the executive order required the hospital to cease clinic services to over 2,900 patients and dismiss clinic staff. However, the hospital is attempting to absorb some of the activities of the clinic with volunteers and medication they have on hand. The operational costs of the clinic are about \$12,000 per month.

Suspending this program may result in the preventable deaths of the patients they are called to serve. Funds should be sent to Quakerdale Business Services, P.O. Box 8, New Providence, IA 50206. Be sure to label your check for 'Lugulu Easter Offering' so your funds are credited correctly. Your generous support will be greatly appreciated.

IOWA USFW SPRING FLING

April 12, 2025 | 10:00am – 2:30pm | Camp Quaker Heights

Registration: 9:30am | Retreat Cost: \$15.00

To Register: Contact Sue McCracken

Email: suzmccracken@gmail.com

Call: (641) 233-7987)

REGISTRATION DEADLINE:

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9

“GOD STILL SPEAKS”

Morning Message Presented By:
Don Munson, Camp Quaker Heights Director

LUNCHEON

Morning:
Announcements
Praise & Worship
Message

Afternoon:
Praise and Business
Meeting with a discussion
of ways to secure a future
for Iowa USFW!

2025 WPU BEANE LECTURE

A Panel Discussion on the Challenges of The Religious Leadership of Women

Tuesday, March 25, 2025 | 11:15 AM – 12:00pm | Chief Mahaska Room |

Atkins Student Union | William Penn University, Oskaloosa, IA



DELLA STANLEY-GREEN (MODERATOR)
QUAKER LEADERSHIP CENTER DIRECTOR
EARLHAM SCHOOL OF RELIGION



PAM HISCOCK BRAMAN
GENESIS CONFERENCE SUPERINTENDENT
FREE METHODIST CHURCH



SYLVIA GRAVES BEANE
FORMER GENERAL SECRETARY
FRIENDS UNITED MEETING

2025 CALENDAR

JAN

FEB

22 | Quaker Men
Family Banquet

28-Mar 1 | Frostbit
Youth Winter
Retreat at CQH

MAR

21-22 | Spring Body
and Leadership
Workshop
at Bear Creek and
Earlham Friends

APRIL

12 | USFW
Spring Fling
at CQH

MAY

3 | CQH Work Day &
Cookie Day

17 | CQH Work Day

25 | Ministry Conf.
Registration Sunday

JUNE

10-15 | HS Camp
16-20 | MS Camp
20-22 | Little Fry
24-27 | EL Camp

JULY

24-27 | IAYM
Ministry Conference

AUG

SEPT

12-13 | CQH Work
Day

13-14 | Young Adult
Retreat at CQH

OCT

TBD | Pastor's
Retreat

NOV

TBD | Board on
Coordination

DEC



IAYM OFFICE HOURS



Monday | Closed

Tuesday | 9am-4pm

Wednesday | 9am-12pm

Thursday | 9am-4pm

Friday | By Appointment