



# Congregational Life Cycle

BIRTH

DEATH



**Every Living Thing  
and System has a  
Natural Life Cycle.**

# The Cycle Begins at Birth



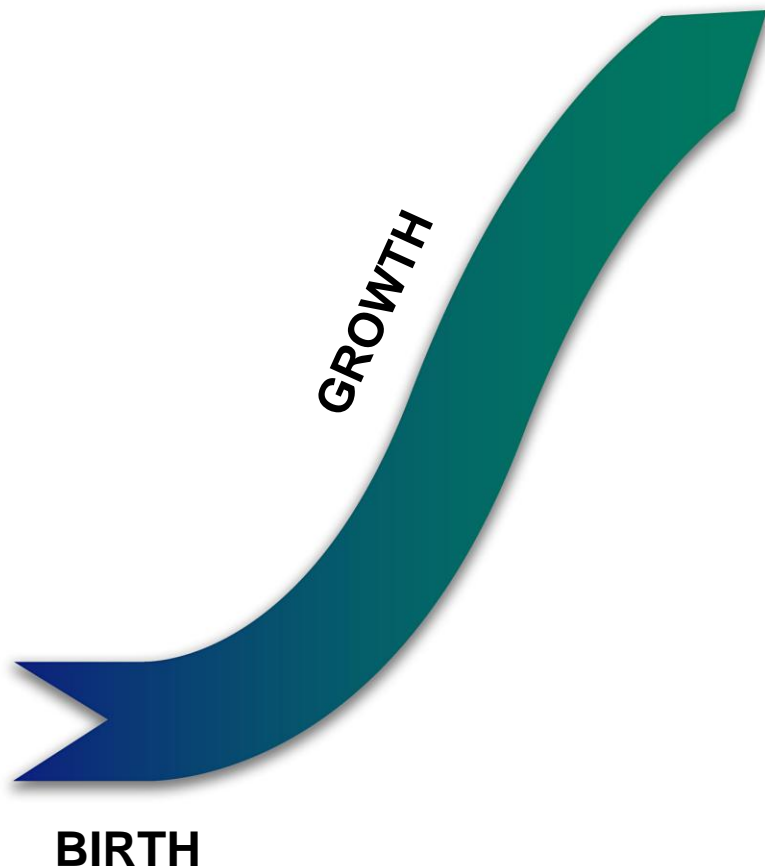
**BIRTH**

■ Potential

■ Purpose and Vision  
(assumed or stated) — DNA

■ Constant Care/Protection

# Birth Is Followed by a Period of Growth

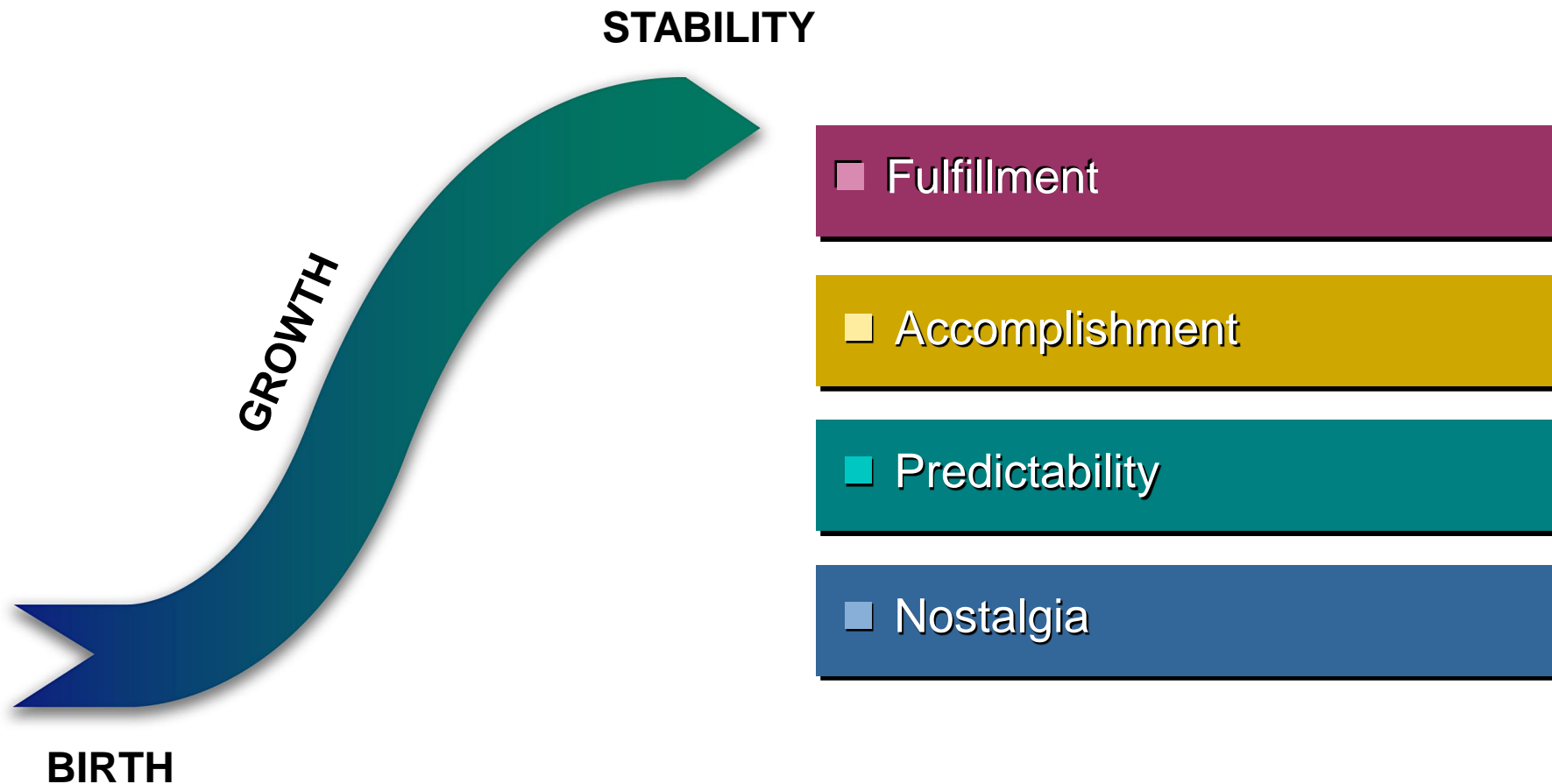


■ Energy and Excitement

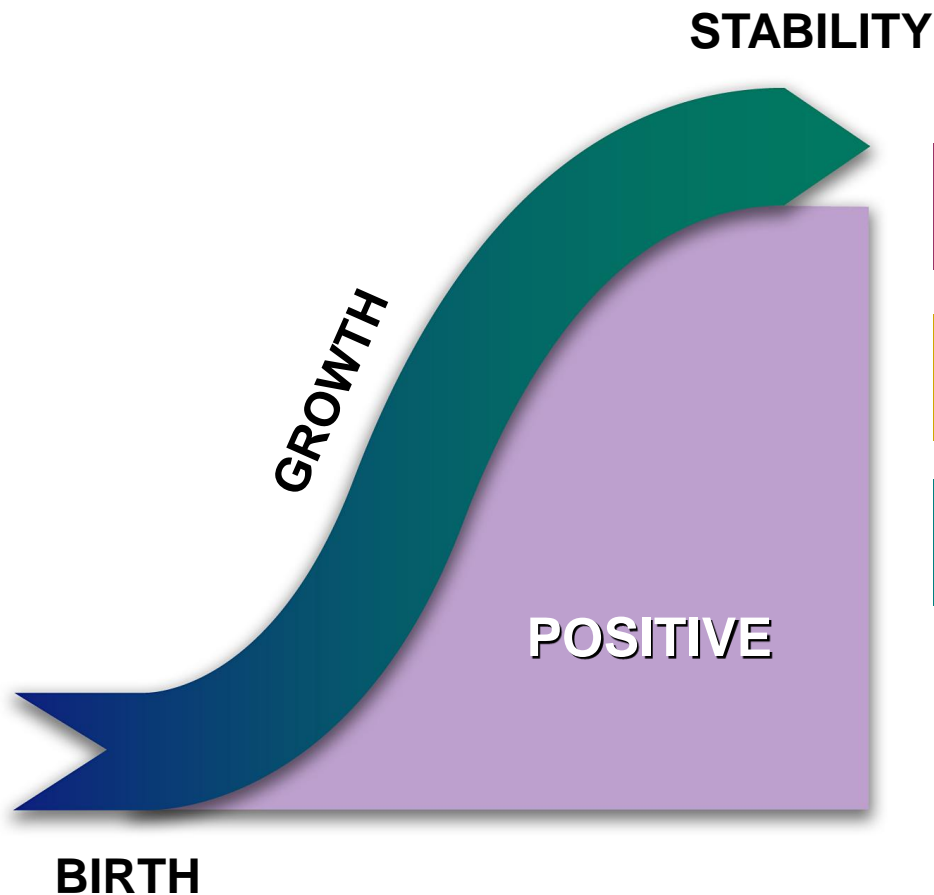
■ Unexpected

■ Progress

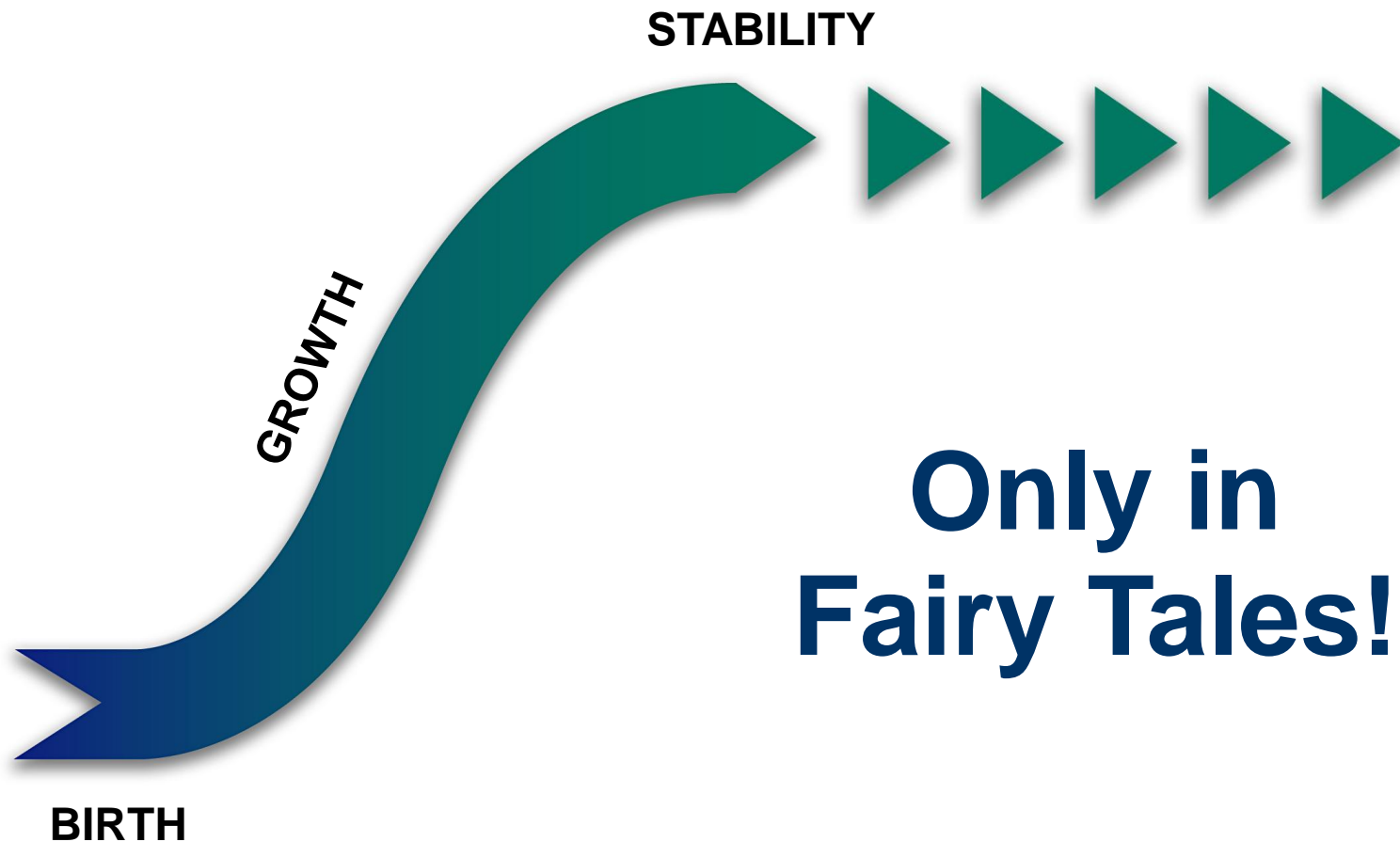
# Growth Is Followed by Stability



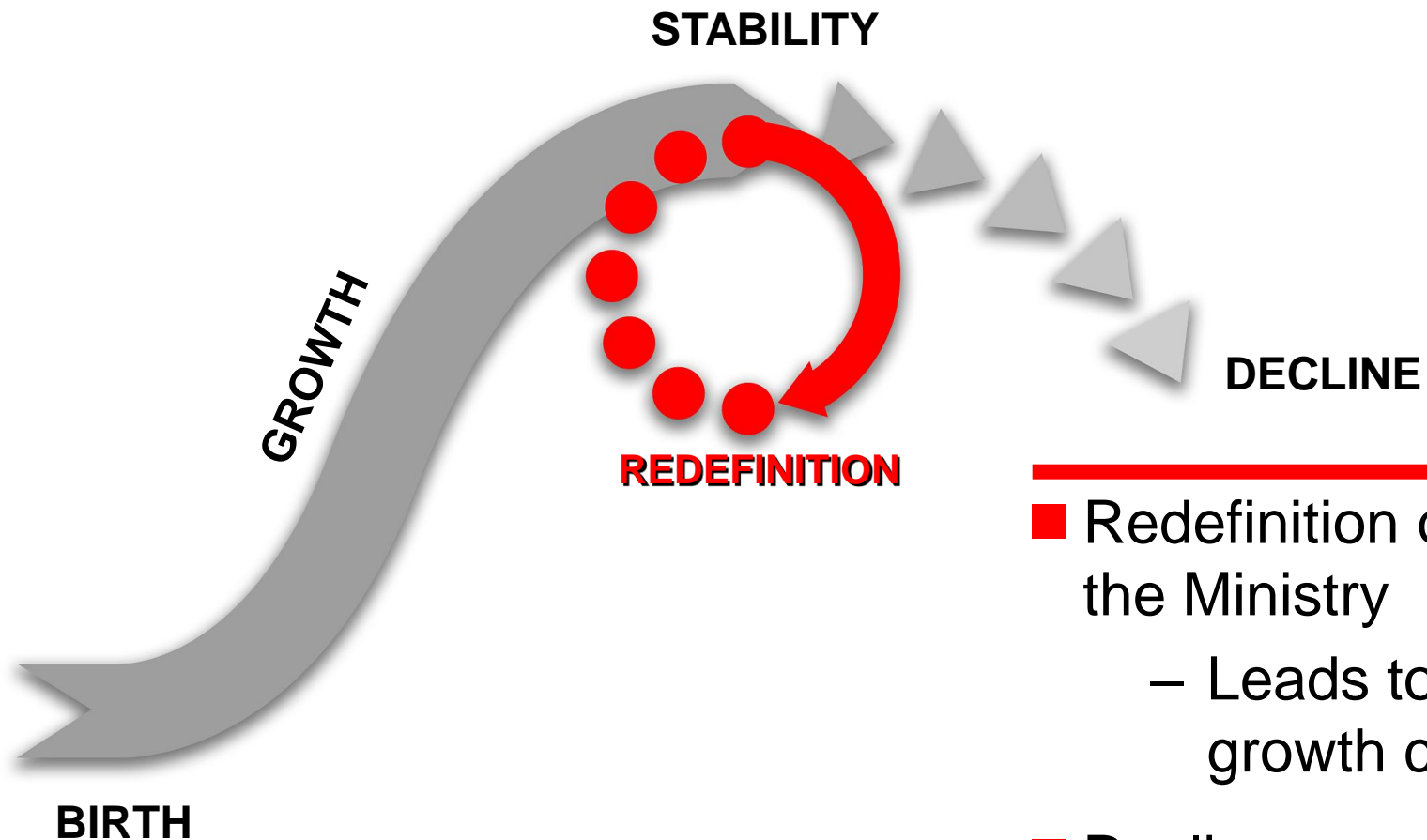
# Growth Half of Life Cycle Is a Time of:



**. . . And They Lived Happily Ever After!**



# One of Two Things Follows Stability

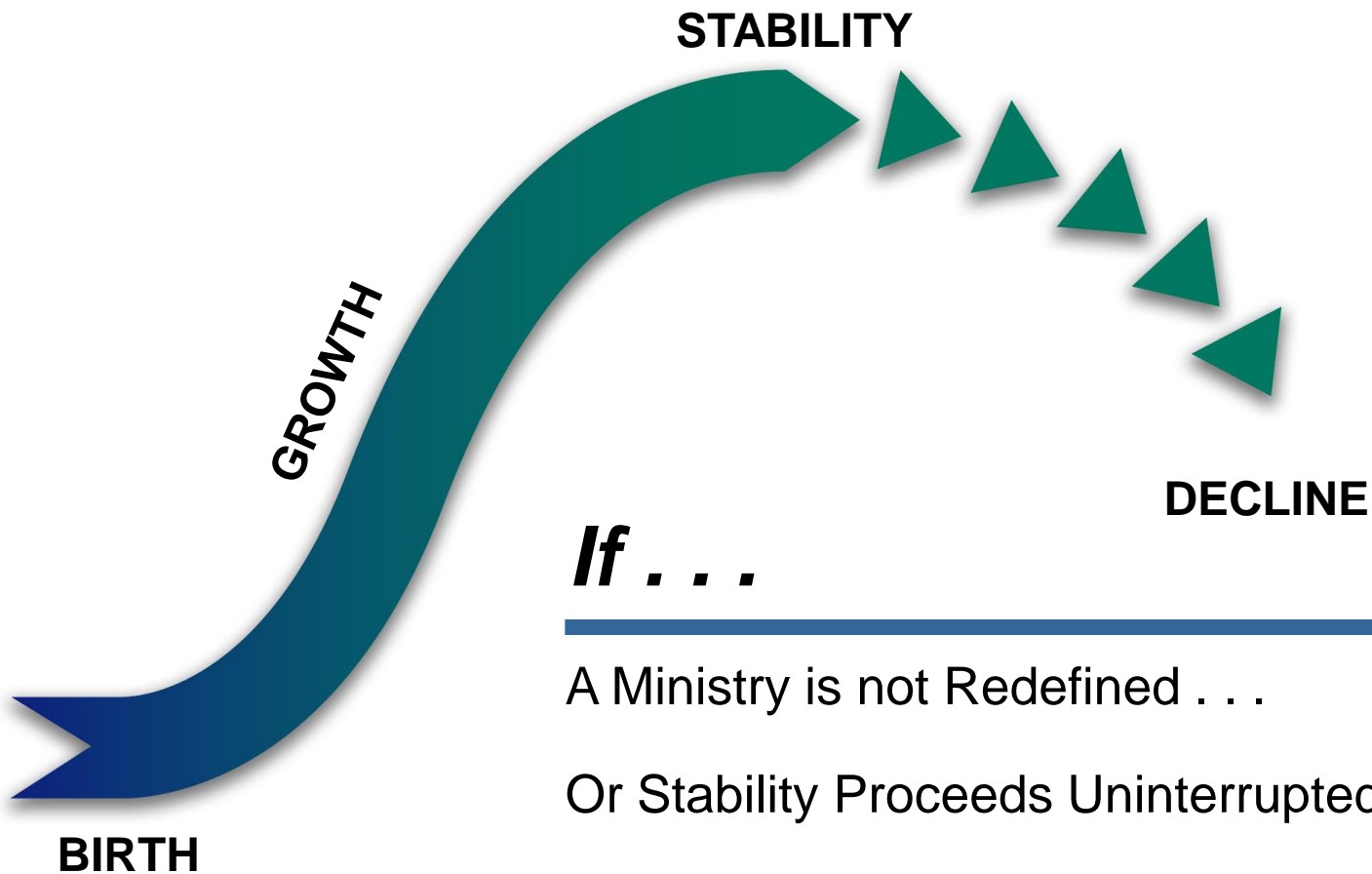


- 
- Redefinition of the Ministry
    - Leads to a new growth cycle
  - Decline



# Ministry Can Be Re-defined by Answering These Questions

- What was the original vision of the ministry?
- What has been accomplished?
- What is new that was not anticipated?
- Where do we want to see this ministry in three to five years?



***If . . .***

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A Ministry is not Redefined . . .

Or Stability Proceeds Uninterrupted . . .

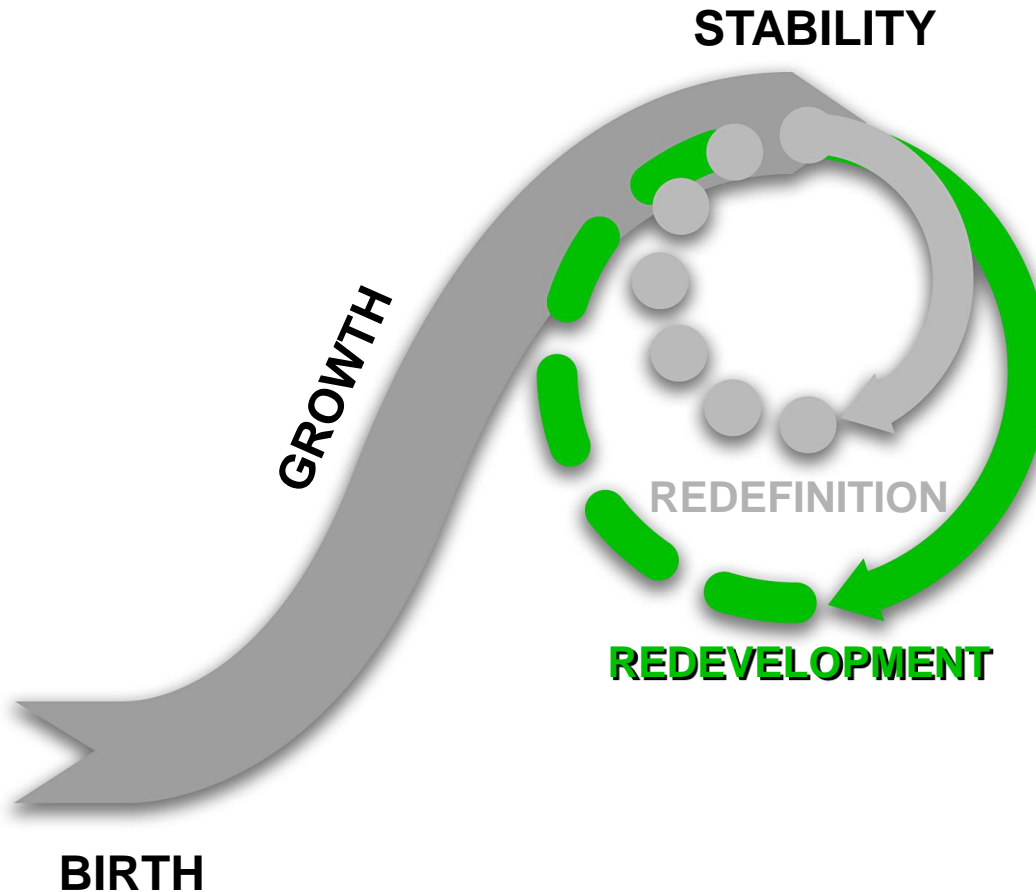
**DECLINE WILL UNQUESTIONABLY FOLLOW.**

Once a ministry is in decline  
there is still the possibility  
of new life.

—

But the cost of new  
life is greater.

# Reversing Decline Requires Redevelopment



- 
- Not just new information
  - But also new and different purpose and direction

# Redevelopment

- New information alone will not reverse decline
- A new, different purpose and direction can reverse decline
- New purpose will be experienced by the congregation as significant change, and by some as loss

Intervening in  
decline is difficult.

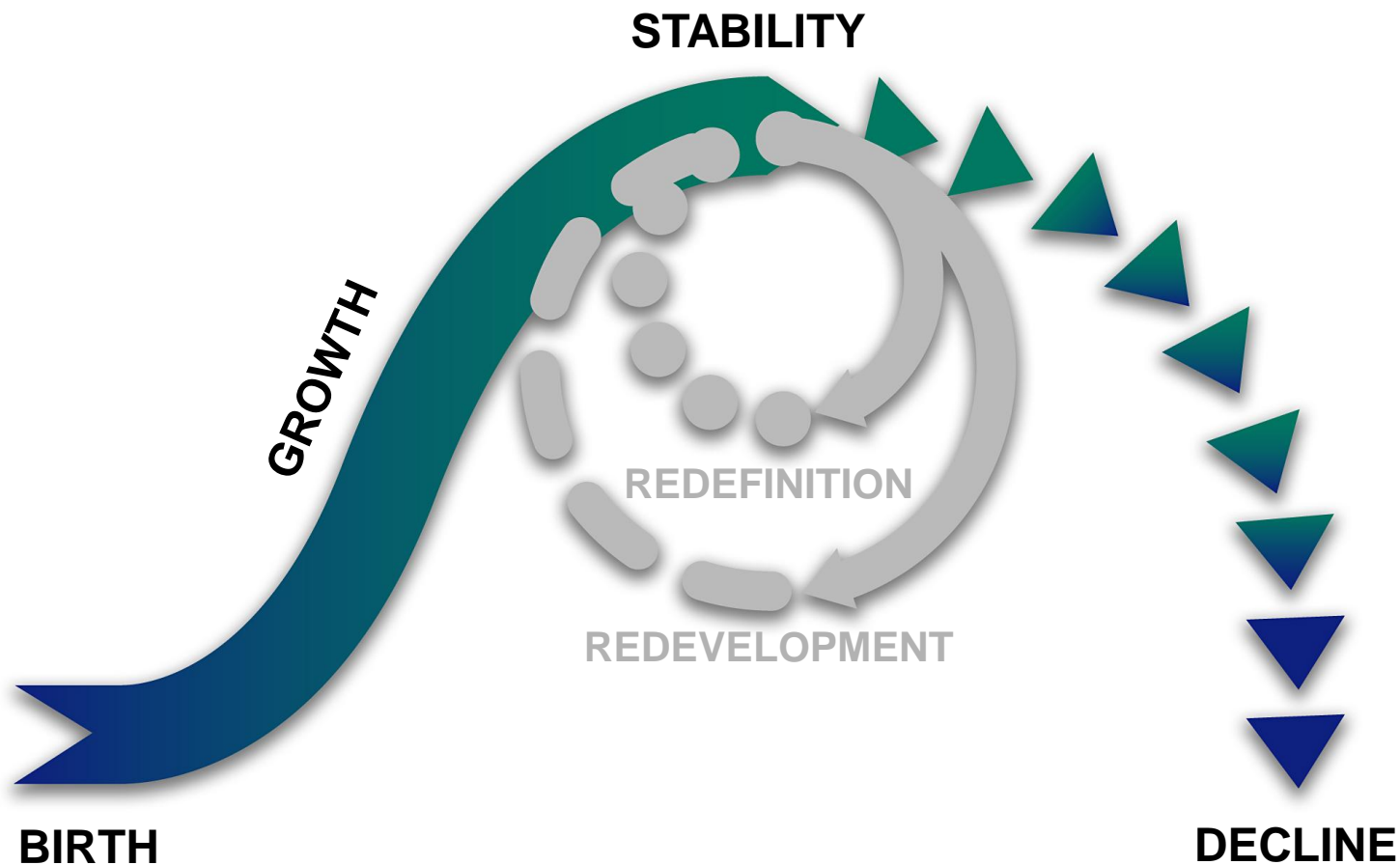
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It requires skilled and  
differentiated leadership.

# Differentiated Leaders

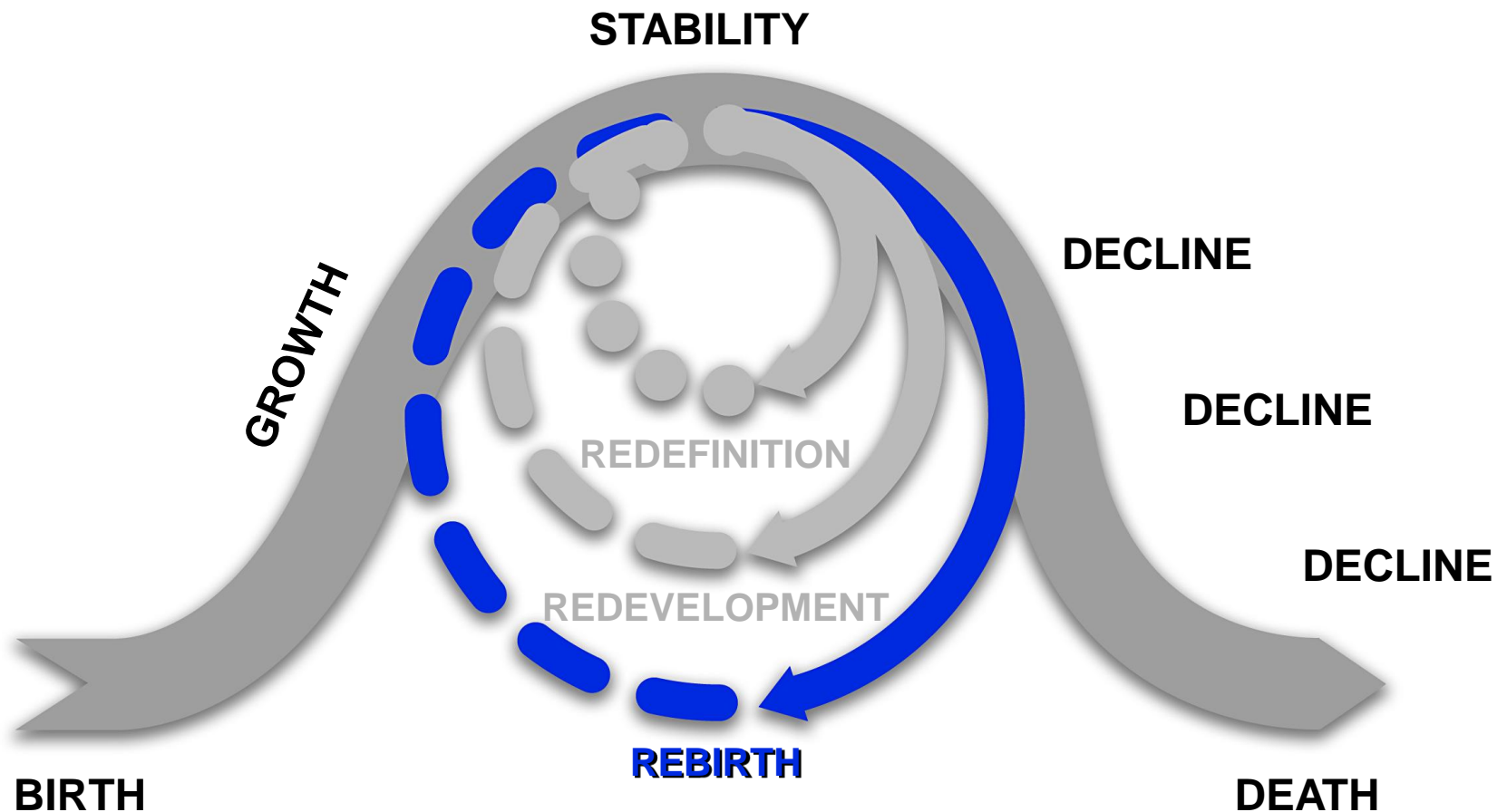
- Don't require affirmation from the congregation
- Do not change course in response to the discomfort provoked by change

# Without Redefinition or Redevelopment, Unchecked Decline Will Only Lead to More Serious Decline





# To Reverse Serious Decline Requires Rebirth



To rebirth a  
seriously **DECLINING**  
ministry requires  
*radical* change.

Rebirth will involve a different purpose or ministry.

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It is not just doing the old thing differently, it is doing a new thing. And, perhaps in a different place or with different people.

Without rebirth, decline  
will lead to death.

Some facts about decline.

As the depth  
of decline increases,  
more interruption and  
letting go is required.

# Characteristics of Decline



Anxiety

Fear

Denial

Paranoia

Conflict

It is the nature of congregational decline to deny the decline as long as possible, to underestimate the decline, and then to *under* respond.

Declining congregations —

- Ignore the congregational cold
- Treat congregational pneumonia with aspirin
- Embalm with penicillin



There is no gain for  
underestimating decline.

—

There is no penalty for  
overestimating decline.

Resurrection does not follow denial —

Resurrection (new life) follows death (truth telling)

The questions are:

- What needs to die?
- What needs to be let go of?



# **Life Cycle Learnings**

BIRTH

DEATH

# Life Cycle Learnings

When ***Growing***:

- ***Encourage*** the Growth

- ***Maximize*** the Growth

- ***Resource*** the Growth

# Life Cycle Learnings

When ***Stable***:

- Redefine/Revision the Ministry

- Identify the “New Information”

- Use Demographic Data — Both About the Congregation Itself and the Congregational Context

# Life Cycle Learnings

When ***Declining***:

***Intervene —***

■ Early

■ Accurately

# Life Cycle Learnings

When ***Dead***:

***Bury***

■ Remember

■ Entrust

■ Let Go

# The Congregational Life Cycle

