

Session I: Leading Change in the Church

Prayer: Dear Lord, *Thank you for our church community.* Thank you Jesus for your sacrifice and ongoing love, and for enabling us to grow into your body. Thank you for bringing together faithful people with all of the gifts we need to become the body of Christ. *Be present with us.* Bless our church community that we may faithfully fulfill your will and purposes. Help us abide in you. *Help us love one another.* Grant us the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, unity, harmony, truth and growth. Help us accept diverse views and encourage loving confrontations to grapple with problems directly and openly. Unite us in one body, one heart and one soul and only for your purposes. Amen.

Beginning Exercise: *Let's consider changes that have happened in our church community during the past year or two. (List them and discuss some of their effects and the responses to them.)*

Examples of significant changes a church community might experience include:

1. New clergy and/or leadership styles
 - a. Loss of long time pastoral style leader (especially if this was not alleviated by an interim or grieving period and shortly following Tom Weber's leaving)
 - b. Beginning implementation of growth objectives by new leaders
 - c. Natural differences in style, approach, activities between leaders
2. Size transition
 - a. Recognition of earlier growth when connection with pastor is lost (sense of church being larger, loss of home)
 - b. New people
 - c. Restated desire for more growth
3. Broader context
 - a. National church issues
 - b. Economy
 - c. Political, such as war
 - d. Personal and family

As leaders we need to be aware of our reactions to change.

- a. Change causes stress. Cumulative change causes greater stress.
- b. A natural response is to slow down to get our bearings (to resist change rather than responding to it).
- c. People who initiate change are more successful than those who merely react or adjust to it. (A terrific little book on adaptation is the best-selling fable by Spencer Johnson, *Who Moved My Cheese: An A-Mazing Way to Deal With Change in Your Work and Life.*)
- d. Leadership needs to continue to steer in the right direction and help others develop confidence in that direction.
- e. A challenge of leadership is taking the energy surrounding a response to change and making it positive.

- i. Look for ways to stretch and grow (like exercise)
- ii. Different people have different stress tolerances (challenge of *Leadership Without Easy Answers*)

Consider how St. Paul addresses change and encourages unity in his letters, especially in Ephesians 4.

Scripture Lesson: Ephesians 4: 1-7; 11-16

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift.

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

Discussion and Questions

St. Paul says, "I beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called . . . There is one God who is above all and through all and in all. . . Each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift; he gave gifts to his people. The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, [until we] grow up in every way into Christ [, joined together so that each of us promotes the growth of the body in love].

Paul speaks of the unity of the spirit and of oneness. What does he mean? What does this require and what works against this?

Eugene Peterson says in the Introduction to James in *The Message*:

When Christian believers gather in churches, everything that can go wrong sooner or later does. Outsiders, on observing this, conclude that there is nothing to the religion business except, perhaps, business—and dishonest business at that. Insiders see it differently. Just as a hospital collects the sick under one roof and labels them as such, the church collects sinners. Many of the people outside the hospital are every bit as sick as the ones inside, but their illnesses are either undiagnosed or disguised. It's similar with sinners outside the church.

So Christian churches are not, as a rule, model communities of good behavior. They are, rather, places where human misbehavior is brought out in the open, faced, and dealt with.

The letter of James shows one of the church's early pastors skillfully going about his work of confronting, diagnosing, and dealing with areas of misbelief and misbehavior that had turned up in congregations committed to his care. Deep and living wisdom is on display here, wisdom both rare and essential. Wisdom is not primarily knowing the truth, although it certainly includes that; it is skill in living. For, what good is a truth if we don't know how to live it? What good is an intention if we can't sustain it?

According to church traditions, James carried the nickname "Old Camel Knees" because of thick calluses built up on his knees from many years of determined prayer. The prayer is foundational to the wisdom. Prayer is always foundational to wisdom.

How do we unite our church community?

Not everyone enjoys changes. Often, the accepted way of seeing things and doing things gets in the way of transitions from the old to the new. As the visions for our church communities become clear, our challenge is to successfully put our new insights into practice.

Proverbs 16:3 reminds us, "Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established." *Ask people what things we might do to help unite our community in times of change and add some of these items to the list as appropriate:*

Focus on a strong sense of shared purpose. We continually draw and inspire people with a significant mission to be accomplished together in a supportive community. As we implement activities to support our purpose, we need to keep our focus on the purpose rather than on the activities. Our activities should bring people to Jesus or serve people for Jesus.

Actively Listen. Be sure people know they are heard. Be sure people understand that being heard does not mean they must have their own way.

Ask for greater commitment. The attitude with which we approach our church largely makes our church whatever it becomes for us. Everyone benefits from commitment. Committed people contribute more and receive more because their experiences are important to them. We need not accept apathy or resistance. Commitment means being connected, trusting one another and acting together.

Build a team. The mission of the church is the work of all of us. Each of us needs help and support from the people around us. Jesus was careful to make formation of a leadership and support group a priority of his ministry, even though at times it must have seemed a great nuisance. When a single leader is resisted or persecuted, a dozen others will carry on the mission.

Change the way we do things. A new focus calls for a new way of doing things. We will not get a different result by doing the same things we have always done. We need to add new activities to support our vision and eliminate old practices that do not support our vision. Innovation does not mean having to try harder or do more difficult things. A healthy pruning and fertilizing makes growth simpler. When faced with a challenge, we tend to try to go back to the basics and do what we do best. We rely on behaviors that have enabled us to perform well and succeed. We depend on old habits and tend to resist new ones because they make us feel clumsy, awkward and more at risk. But to achieve more, we have to adopt new attitudes and behaviors. We need to try new things, to simplify and eliminate unnecessary or ineffective processes. Each of us needs to put some adventure into our approach and to constantly look for new ways to do everything better.

Take risks and accept mistakes. The inertia of the old way of doing things is more crippling than the mistakes we make in trying new things. We cannot be sure of what works until we try it; we will not know where the path leads until we take it. We need to improvise rather than over analyzing and delaying. Learning from mistakes and moving on creates energy and momentum – unless we take ourselves too seriously.

Broadly assign responsibilities. People who spread Christianity are people with initiative and a huge feeling of responsibility to God and one another. We are each critically important to achieving our purpose and we each need to receive and accept meaningful assignments we can successfully achieve. This means that each of us needs to find tasks for which we are gifted. The body of Christ will be unbalanced or limited in growth unless all of its members grow.

Be passionate as leaders. The pace and tone of the leaders often becomes the pace and tone of the community. Enthusiasm and commitment is highly contagious and inspires others to action. Leaders avoid trouble by acting confidently and purposefully during times of change.

Build momentum. We need a sense of urgency for our mission and we need to avoid making our task seem too overwhelming. By celebrating early achievements, we demonstrate progress and encourage each other to keep pursuing our mission. People begin to enjoy being part of a growing mission-oriented community. Slowing down may give some people a sense of safety, but if our vision is true we are safer moving toward it as quickly as possible.

Share personal experiences. In churches advancing their missions, people talk comfortably and often about the significant role Jesus (rather than the congregation) plays in their everyday lives. Communicating helps individuals to understand their spiritual journeys and also strengthens the bonds between people in the congregation.

Pray without ceasing. Our lives and our community need to be centered in God and God will transform them. When things are changing, it is easy to become anxious about the future or to focus too heavily on what has not worked. In prayer, we realize that God is with us.

Encourage confrontations. Most of us are uncomfortable with confrontations. We may avoid dealing with a challenge or problem just because we dislike confronting another person. And yet, confrontations are necessary for moving forward. Confrontation is the opposite of avoiding; confrontation means simply meeting face-to-face, or addressing. Thus, confrontations can and should be positive. When we address a problem or a challenge with another person, we often can reconcile with that person. We can learn and grow together. For that reason, confrontations are required in any successful relationship, especially love.

In a sermon entitled "What is God?" Austin Farrer referred to the story of Jacob wrestling with God to make God declare what God was, and said of the struggle: "God had not revealed what he was, but he had told Jacob what Jacob was, and had blessed him. And so it is practical doctrine that if we wrestle with God's holy will we shall find out what we are, and what we are called to be." We are hesitant to wrestle with God as Jacob did for that seems awfully irreverent. But to be blessed with self-discovery and the discovery of God, we must confront God and one another.

Focus on results, not methods. We need to focus on the desired result itself, not the process or the means necessary to achieve the result. We do not have to know how we are going to get there, but we need to know where we want to go. Having a clear picture of what we want to accomplish is crucial. We need to start by defining our goals, not by worrying about everything that will be involved in getting from here to there. By visualizing our arrival, we begin to "magnetize" ourselves to the ways and means for getting there. We can never get everything neatly organized and eliminate all risks. But if we are open minded, goal-focused, and willing to experiment, we may shape our specific techniques as we go.

Jesus tells us that we need to be transformed, to be born again. A breakthrough requires a radical departure from old habits. Most people assume success comes incrementally – one step at a time – and we must move systematically from our present level of understanding to the next. But if we need to do several things to get to the next level of understanding, we may be able to get to the next level faster by learning (doing) several new things at once. It may be just as easy to change several of the habits we need to change at the same time.

Act as a team. As leaders, share a consistent message and avoid triangulation.

Over Communicate! Use all possible forms of communication and have a variety of leaders share information to build broader trust. Be sure to celebrate adequately and to keep the other actions above in mind (such as admitting mistakes and challenges, asking for help, encouraging confrontations and sharing personal experiences).

Goal Starters

The church governing board needs to set detailed goals for the congregation. Some goals will come from fully answering the following questions:

What does God seem to be calling the congregation to do at this time? (It may be that the ministry of the past few years is affirmed and continued. It is also possible that while the former direction of ministry is affirmed, the congregation will recognize that new challenges call for new resources.)

What resources do we bring to the mission of the church in the area of leading change and what resources do we need to bring?

What outside resources do we need (skills, networks for sharing, consultants, workshops, training, funding, support)?

What are the main goals of the church?

When will they be accomplished?

Who is responsible for accomplishing these goals?

Goals might look like this:

Goals and strategies	When	Whom	Benchmarks
We will worship God by becoming disciples who help Jesus make new and stronger disciples			
Leadership Goal: Strengthen Our Communication			
Celebrate!			Especially people, programs, outreach ministries, history, tradition, successful changes
Establish regular forums or Q&A sessions			
Strengthen and expand website & email communications			Develop flowchart with information about ministries and scheme of adult formation; communicate through small group leaders
Governing Board spotlight on important activities			Plan at each meeting

Resources for Further Study

Campbell, Dennis G. Congregations as Learning Communities: Tools for Shaping Your Future. Alban Institute, 2000.

Conflict Management in Congregations, ed. David Lott, Alban Institute, 2001.

Freidman, Edwin H., Freidman's Fables. Guildford Press, 1990.

Herrington, Jim, Mike Bonem and James H. Furr. Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000.

Johnson, Spencer. Who Moved My Cheese: An A-Mazing Way to Deal With Change in Your Work and Life. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1998.

Kotter, John P. Leading Change. Harvard Business School Press. 1996

Senge, Peter. The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of The Learning Organization. Currency, 1990.

Senge, Peter, Art Kleiner (Editor), Charlotte Roberts, Rick Ross, Bryan Smith. The Fifth Discipline Workbook. Currency, 1994.

Senge, Peter, Art Kleiner, Charlotte Roberts, George Roth, Rick Ross, Bryan Smith. The Dance of Change: The Challenges of Sustaining Momentum in Learning Organizations. Currency, 1999.