

LEADING CONGREGATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

OUR STORY

1. In 1997 the American Baptist Churches of the West was a region of over 200 congregations that was in significant decline:

Only 37 congregations were growing in any way
The average size congregation was 100 (Many had been between 200-500 in previous decades)
Giving to missions was on a ten year decline
The average age of our congregations was in the mid-fifties
The average age of our pastors was in the high fifties
There were less than 800 baptisms (conversions) a year

2. God did a miracle in our congregations in five years (1997-2001):

There were 153 growing congregations
Average worship attendance went from 100 to 188
Giving to missions increased 25% and over a million new dollars were given
The average age of congregations was in the forties
The average age of our pastors was in the forties
Baptisms were averaging 2000 a year

3. The miracle continues:

Congregations are continuing to grow and now reproduce
Our congregations are planting ten new congregations a year
God is using our story to encourage other denominations to transform

4. Only God grows His church. However, in the process of watching God do this in our region of congregations we have learned some important lessons about the entire process of congregational transformation.

ASSUMPTIONS

1. Growth is a major (but not the only) indicator of health. However, the lack of growth is a clear indicator of disease.
2. Congregations failing to grow through the making of new disciples are disobedient congregations.
3. Congregations that are unhealthy, and therefore not growing, will not go through the transformation process without deep pain. Unhealthy congregations do not change without the loss of some leaders who have contributed to their lack of health.
4. The pain can be lessened to some degree, but not avoided, if those leading change:
 - Understand the difference between change and transition
 - See themselves as both leaders and change agents and are willing to withstand deep pain
 - Are willing to risk their position to lead the change
 - Demonstrate the trust that enables people to follow them
5. Inward focused congregations are always unhealthy and systemic change will not occur until the congregation becomes more outward focused than inward.

TRANSFORMATION – CREATING URGENCY

1. Much is said and written about casting vision in order to lead change. All of that is true. However, the same amount of time that is spent casting vision (which is usually too little to have buy-in to the vision) must be spent in creating urgency. **The reason is that when people are given the choice between vision and the status quo they will always pick the status quo.**
2. Therefore people must always be given the choice between a wonderful vision and an unacceptable status quo. (Moses: Egypt with slavery, cruelty, and the death of boy children versus your own land flowing with milk and honey)
3. Leaders in unhealthy congregations need to plan to spend 2-5 years helping the congregation become so dissatisfied with their current situation that they will embrace a new vision that implements an outward focused mission rather than an inward one.

4. Obviously the pastor needs to begin to develop urgency from a Biblical and theological perspective (assuming the concept that unhealthy non-disciple making congregations are disobedient to God's Great Commission).

5. In the preaching role the tendency is to tell the congregation about the lost in the community and then use guilt to try and motivate people to want to do something about it. This never works since guilt for the most part never motivates any of us to change. Instead in our communication we need to help people overhear the need and motivate them by compassion (not compulsion) to want to act.

This means learning to preach inductively with the significant use of stories to help people overhear the message

It also means the use of visuals to help people see the needs and feel compassion

Pastors need to tap into the concerns of individuals in the congregation who

God is already preparing to care for certain groups or individuals

6. The pastor also needs to begin to develop a sense of urgency from the perspective of where the congregation is now, compared to what God was doing some years ago.

Discuss with the board and other groups the historical future of the congregation

Tell and show stories of significant ministry experiences in the past

Talk about individuals and groups currently not being reached (children, teens)

Demonstrate how much money and people it now takes to make a disciple

7. Leaders also develop urgency by sharing where the community is now and how the congregation is or is not relating to its community.

It means sitting down with the leaders of the community and letting them share what they believe to be the greatest needs in the community

It may mean doing ride "alongs" with police, fire, or paramedics, etc.

This information is passed on the congregation by way of stories and testimonials

These issues are presented as prayer needs for the congregation

Drive/walk the neighborhoods looking at them through Jesus Christ's eyes

8. Urgency can be brought to the congregation's attention by dealing openly with generational issues.

Leaders need to demonstrate that all generations have their strengths and concerns (Honor strengths and state concerns inductively or by over hearing)

Leaders help the congregation feel the need of losing the contributions from the missing generations

Generational connectedness does not come in fellowship, it comes in mission

9. The national scene enables us to create urgency like never before.

We are the third largest pagan nation in the world
80-85 % of all congregations are declining or on a plateau
The net loss of congregations each week is 38
Church attendance in the U.S. is on a decline
People claiming to be Protestant in the U.S. is just now over 50%
The average size congregation in the U.S. is 75

10. Just as the preacher creates a preaching calendar, create an urgency calendar. Each month the leader selects one issue to explore in a variety of ways that focuses on the needs that surround the congregation and could be addressed if the congregation was healthy. It must be remembered that while this is being done, the pastor is also casting vision for a better future. The point is to contrast this future with an unacceptable present.

TRANSFORMATION – CASTING A COMPELLING VISION

1. The casting of a compelling vision is done simultaneously while creating urgency. They are done equally. It is not imperative at this point to have a well crafted vision statement, although that may come at some point. The idea is to help people see and feel how they can become a part of something that is alive and vital, that will accomplish something bigger than them as individuals or they as a congregation.

2. This means that the vision when initially developed must be bigger than the congregation and go beyond the scope of the local congregation's campus. It must be stated in terms of a changed community. The health and resultant growth in the congregation is not an end, but a means to an end, fulfilling the Great Commission in the congregation's community.

3. Good vision statements are hard to craft since they are usually 5-20 years goals, that are big enough to stir the blood, small enough to be accomplished in a generation, and short enough to be put on a bumper sticker.

4. Good pastoral leaders are people who play various roles, those being:

Prophet
Passionate Communicator
Forecaster
Passionate Leader, who has a glimpse of what is over the next hill
Committed to the long term

5. This means that vision (in congregations where there is none and the morale is as low as it can get) must start with the leader, the pastor.

6. The pastor then needs to perform some behaviors that will produce the development of vision, if such does not come easily for the pastor.

- Pray for passion for him/her self and for the congregation
- Pray that God will bring those experiences that will produce vision
- Walk and drive the community at different times looking at it from God's perspective
- Look at what attracts people and where they congregate in the community
- Interview key people in different segments of the community
- Do drive "alongs"
- Join and participate in civic and community groups
- Visit other congregations that are impacting their own communities
- Enter into a mentoring relationship with another visionary pastor

7. The pastor's role in communicating the vision God is placing in the pastor's heart is a multi-faceted one.

- Remember **almost no one** gets it (vision) the first fifty times or more
- Remember **vision leaks**
- Remember **no one buys into it** if they sense your tenure is not long
- Prepare your stump speech
- Every Sunday in some way vision and urgency are communicated
- Communicating vision is a 24/7 task
- Vision is shared both corporately and individually
- Spend more time with those who are beginning to get it

8. Remember vision is cast and caught when the leader communicates in three major ways:

- Tell stories, tell stories, tell stories
- Speak positively assuming everyone wants to listen, assume the best in people
- Always talk about how the group (the congregation) will achieve the vision

9. Create a vision calendar to go with your urgency calendar determining how vision will be communicated each month.

10. **Vision** and **Urgency** will not become part of the congregation's DNA if the pastor does not work at both with great intentionality and tenacity.

TRANSFORMATION – DEVELOPING COALITIONS

1. The pastor needs to develop a number of coalitions to be prepared for the day when the congregation is ready to jettison the unacceptable current situation and begin to embrace a new beginning. The better the development of these groups the more effective and more quickly the change will come.
2. First form a team of people (do not worry about the size, 3-4 committed individuals are better than a larger group that is not committed) to pray for the congregation, the community, and God's future work in the congregation to produce change. Many may see this as revival or having more spiritual fervor for God, which is fine. However, the pastor needs to pray with them and keep informing them of the vision and urgency issues that are being raised that month. The pastor will probably need to train this group to stay on task and not get lost praying for individuals in the congregation that hopefully other people and groups are praying for at the same time. This group needs to learn to pray for the BIG PICTURE issues.
3. The second team to be formed is made up of those who will help the pastor initiate the vision and many of the changes. Notice I did not say lead the change. This group is formed by going through the congregation and finding those who are already discontent with the status quo and have at different times expressed their frustration with the lack of movement by the congregation. Usually these people are not the ones you want leading change. However they can be quite helpful in initiating a vision and direction for the congregation. The pastor along with those in the group should be involved in exploring the community to see how God wants the congregation to serve it effectively. The pastor should continually feed these people new ideas while interacting vigorously with the ideas raised by the group.
4. The third group formed by the pastor is comprised of current and future leaders who are open or already excited about a new direction. This means the pastor needs to begin to distinguish between leaders who are in formal places of leadership and those leaders who exercise their influence informally. The pastor then recruits all those with leadership potential who are not invested in or wedded to the status quo. The pastor's responsibility is to spend as much time with these people, individually and in a group to disciple them and prepare them for future leadership roles in the congregation.
5. At some point down the road the pastor needs to form a fourth group made up of potential workers who will help the leaders implement change. As the pastor develops leaders the new leaders can assist the pastor in the recruitment and discipleship of these future workers.

TRANSFORMATION – STRUCTURES THAT SUPPORT CHANGE

CAVEATS THAT NEED CONSIDERING AT THIS POINT:

1. It is important to note at this juncture that creating urgency, casting a compelling vision, and developing coalitions for change require a different job description for a pastor. This means the pastor will have to be wise in how current job expectations are met and how the new ones are assimilated into the pastor's current role. It does mean that leading transition and change involves hard work.
2. It takes from one to five years to prepare an unhealthy congregation for change. All that has been described to this point is preparatory work.
3. When the pastor has enough new leaders, workers, and regular attenders in the congregation who want change, it is time to invite someone from the outside to help the pastor and congregation make the required changes. (Denomination, Consultant, etc)
4. Hopefully by the third year of the pastor's tenure the pastor has developed a strategy to gain control of the nomination process for the congregation.
5. If the pastor has done the proper job of preparation and those invested in maintaining the status quo want the pastor to leave, I now believe the pastor needs to stay and lead and if need be take the controversy to the congregation for their input and decision.

DEVELOP AN EFFECTIVE STRUCTURE THAT SUPPORTS THE VISION

1. Change always starts with mission and vision, it never starts with structure. However, if structure does not change than the mission and vision will eventually be lost.
2. Structure is like a skeleton in a body:
 - Trouble: If you can see your skeleton
 - Trouble: If you have no skeleton
 - Trouble: If the skeleton does not grow to allow the body to do the same
3. An effective structure demands a major shift in the structural paradigms of most congregations. This paradigms shift means that the laity gives up the leadership of the congregation to the pastor(s) and the pastor(s) give up the ministry to the laity.
4. An effective leadership structure marries three key concepts that are usually separated in most congregations. Those concepts are **authority, responsibility, and accountability**.
5. An effective structure looks like the following:

The Board Governs through three sets of policies:

Missional policies: Those policies that enable the congregation to implement its mission and achieve its vision

Boundary policies: Those policies that enable the pastor to lead by being told what not to do rather than constantly seeking permission.

Accountability policies: Those policies that hold the board accountable for implementing this model of governance.

The Pastor leads by:

Establishing clear missional goals for which there is specific accountability to the board.

Directing the staff to accomplish the mission and achieve the vision.

The Staff lead and manage ministry:

By achieving clear goals for which the pastor holds them accountable.

By developing leaders to help them achieve their goals

The Congregation conducts the ministries of the Body:

By exercising the gifts and talents God gives the Body.

By being equipped to minister by the Staff and Pastor.