

# THE RESILIENCY OF CONGREGATIONS

© Colon Brown, Roger Heuser, and Norman Shawchuck

Colon Brown  
e-mail: [cbrown277@comcast.net](mailto:cbrown277@comcast.net)

Roger Heuser  
[rogerheuser@cox.net](mailto:rogerheuser@cox.net)

DRAFT: 2/2/04

# THE RESILIENCY OF CONGREGATIONS

## Table of Contents

	Page
© Colon Brown, Roger Heuser, and Norman Shawchuck .....	1
INTRODUCTION .....	4
Why is resiliency important to congregations?.....	6
Chapter One.....	9
What Leaders Do To Produce Resiliency .....	9
<i>First, leaders must be willing to embark on a journey of deep change within them before attempting to change others.</i> .....	9
<i>Second, leaders must be willing to embrace realities of the congregation and its environment by building upon the best of the past with God’s dream for the future.</i> .....	11
<i>Third, leaders must maximize discontinuity and embrace chaos in order to experience a new order.</i> .....	11
<i>Fourth, leaders must remain non-anxious and persistent in a highly anxious, emotionally charged environment.</i> .....	14
<i>Fifth, leaders must develop their inner life.</i> .....	16
<i>Sixth, leaders must be able to articulate appreciative questions that will enable the congregation’s story and dialogue to align the best of the past with a God-given dream for the future.</i> .....	17
<i>Seventh, leaders must be willing to embrace the value and realities of team building in order to involve the gifts of many needed for deep change.</i> .....	19
<i>Last, leaders must be willing to learn the gifts and process of group discernment.</i> ..	19
Chapter Two .....	22
Dispositions of Congregations: Launching .....	22
Chapter Three.....	31
Dispositions of Congregations: Expanding .....	31
Chapter Four.....	40
Dispositions of Congregations: Deepening .....	40
Chapter Five .....	49
Dispositions of Congregations: Pruning .....	49
Chapter Six .....	56
Assumptions Supporting The Resiliency Of Congregations .....	56
For Local Congregations.....	56
1. Congregations are “complex adaptive systems.” .....	56
2. Some of the most disruptive experiences take congregations by surprise. ....	57
3. Dispositions are nonlinear movements that are subject to the limitations of time. .	57
4. Congregations will experience all dispositions, whether intentionally or not. ....	58

5. Dispositions contribute to the congregation’s resiliency and ministry effectiveness.....	59
6. Congregations that remain too long in any disposition will put themselves in danger of being stuck.....	59
7. Robust launching dispositions keep congregations fresh and vital. ....	60
8. Prolonged exposure to the pruning disposition may make launching new ministries difficult if not impossible. ....	60
9. The influence of one disposition will impact the entire congregation.....	61
10. Multiple dispositions can be experienced simultaneously. ....	62
For Clergy and Lay Leaders .....	63
1. Leadership interventions are essential to help congregations be more resilient. ....	63
2. Recognize your “dispositional” preferences and prejudices.....	63
3. Leaders must learn when they over-function and under-function. ....	63
4. Practice the skill of continuous learning. ....	64
For Judicatory Leaders.....	64
1. Establish continuous learning opportunities for both church leaders and congregations. ....	64
2. It would be wise for judicatory leaders to identify pastors with selected dispositions that match the congregation’s dispositions or to offer training to pastors in all four dispositions. ....	64
3. Create a climate for valuing all dispositional expressions. ....	65
4. Value the launching disposition as an essential component for every congregation. ....	65
5. What is true about a congregation is also true for the judicatory.....	65
Appendix 1: Characteristics for Each Disposition.....	66
Appendix 2: Danger Zones/ Stuck Areas for Each Disposition .....	68
Appendix 3: Leadership Interventions for Each Disposition.....	70
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	73

## PREFACE

The authors have been friends for over twenty years; many of the experiences that have shaped our individual spirits we have shared together. When we consider how the personal and spiritual growth we have experienced as individuals, we know that God's grace has been a present reality for each of us and for our little community of three, as dear friends. Like all relationships ours has formed within the context of all kinds of setbacks, joys, and crises of one kind or another.

The authors know the meaning of personal resiliency. We have had, not one but many, experiences that could have done in each one. Somehow, at times through faith in God alone, we not only survived but thrived because of those experiences. Divorce, medical setbacks, custody battles, and even a near-death experience have not separated us; on the contrary, they have brought us closer together as friends. We have cried together over setbacks that have hurt us either by people or by the institutions each of us has served. We have spent many more hours laughing together when we have recovered from our setbacks and could share those same experiences in a completely different light. Being resilient has been a way of life for each us. Many times we have lifted high the glass in celebration of our life together.

It is only natural that we would bring our personal stories of thriving through setbacks to a subject dear to our hearts, the church. As we begin to think about all that has happened to the church throughout the ages, especially in recent times, we come to the same conclusion, the church has also exhibited remarkable resiliency. Even as the church was forming, forces were at work to do it in. From the beginning, the church dealt with new change (Acts 15), persecution, and the imprisonment of its leaders. Today, the church is challenged as never before. The very survival of the institution seems to be a present reality. Yet, it continues to plod forward, recreating itself in remarkable ways.

So how does one account for this amazing resiliency at work within the church? Is it only God's grace that keeps it going? Or, are other factors also at work? We believe God somehow oversees all of this new development in the church and that humankind works in tandem with God's grace to create new institutions; the church is a remarkable combination of God's grace and human spirit. This is never more true than today; great setbacks of every kind now mark the landscape of church life, yet stories of remarkable

thriving are also being told. It is our goal, therefore, to set forth some of our best thinking about how this combination of God's grace and human spirit work together to make the church a resilient organization.

## INTRODUCTION

Are you fully satisfied with the impact your congregation is making upon your community? If not, we invite you to explore a new way of thinking about the resiliency of congregations. Even though your congregation may not be on the brink of a disaster or closing down, we believe congregations face unprecedented challenges in today's changing world that require an understanding of the dynamics of resiliency---the ability to recover from setbacks or spring back after being stretched.

Setbacks are part of life – some are minor like a bump in the road while others are life threatening. Some setbacks we bring upon ourselves and others happen beyond our control. People who overcome adversity possess a disposition that makes them adaptive and willing to learn important lessons from the crisis that will enable them to tackle the next problem. There are numerous examples of resiliency being played out in the world. Stories of survivors from 9/11 inspire us to believe it is possible to discover the capacity deep within ourselves to not only survive, but to live more fully. Stories abound that explore the depth of human courage and spirit that overcome extraordinary circumstances. Many of us are fortunate to know people who have overcome life-threatening conditions, experienced deep change, and lived to tell their story.

This is also true for congregations whose capacity to respond to impediments – however small or significant – is critical to their realizing God's dream for them and through them. As congregations and denominations grow larger and become more complex, the “don't rock the boat” voices predominate the culture. Following the rules becomes more important than pursuing an invigorating vision or fulfilling the mission of the church. Whether it is a church in a changing community, a sexual misconduct charge against a leader, a conflict between key leaders, or a leadership transition, the congregation's capacity to effectively address the crisis is often a matter of life or death for the congregation. Those congregations who don't respond well to the crisis will have people with pain, anger, and unanswered questions. The number of empty pews in churches today may be the result of the congregation's inability to be resilient in the face of adversity. These examples point to the many reasons that congregations slip off track of their destination and purpose. Even if the above descriptions are not your story, we believe every church must assess its capacity to be resilient in times of unprecedented change.

### **Why is resiliency important to congregations?**

From the beginning God's people have demonstrated the capacity to rebound, recover from setbacks, and spring back from adversity in order to make God's dream for humanity a

reality. Resiliency is faith in action bringing hope even in the grimmest circumstances. Faith supplies individuals and congregations with the capacity to be resilient. The writer of Hebrews says, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (11:10). Resilient individuals and congregations demonstrate hope and faith that others do not see because those with resilience act and move in a positive direction in spite of the degree of threat or adversity.

What is the alternative to resiliency? Robert E. Quinn describes the organizational phenomenon of slow death that “...begins when someone, confronting the dilemma of having to make deep organizational change or accepting the status quo, rejects the option for the deep change. This decision results in the gradual (and occasional not so gradual) disintegration of an organization, business, or industry [or church].”<sup>1</sup>

Resilient congregations choose deep change over slow death; change that does not ultimately change the community is self-serving. Communities are changed when congregations send out persons who are resilient and able to address the threatening issues of life. In the past, much of church growth and church health movements have focused on the interior life of the church. In the emerging new world, deep change will ask persons to move beyond their own self interests and comfort zones to do something about change needed in the community.

Deep change is not the latest fad. In the earliest congregations, Paul described the deep change process of those whose adversity can “produce endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us” (Rom 5:3b-5a). Deep change is complex and often unwanted because of the requirements, including at times suffering. It is only after we have gone through the crisis that we recognize its benefits.

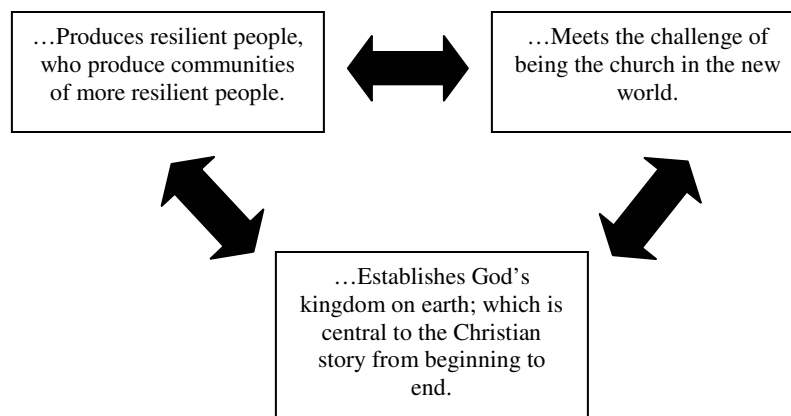
There are stories in every congregation of overcoming obstacles that have threatened the very existence of that congregation which become part of the fabric of the congregation and sometimes take on mythical proportions. Nonetheless, resilient congregations use the obstacles in their present realities to become better congregations. Resiliency is the aptitude to build upon strengths instead of paying attention to deficits. Congregations that face adversity are invited to look within themselves and find the capacity to be resilient; this can be the discovery of their God-given identity, character, and wherewithal to persevere toward a robust future.

From the time that Moses led the Children of Israel out of Egypt and across the Red Sea, God’s people have gone forth to claim their own promised land. Since then, the People of God have consistently experienced adversity, threats, and testing. Indeed, every congregation is characterized by wide-ranging experiences encompassing unique places, times, challenges, and

opportunities. How we respond to life's threats determines whether we become victims or partners with God in creating a new future. Resilient congregations learn how to engage in deep change and, in many cases, reinvent themselves to meet new challenges and opportunities.

In summary, just as individuals have the ability to spring back from setbacks, so do groups of people like congregations. When congregations exhibit resiliency they do so in the spirit of all God's people throughout the generations who have done likewise. The church is a remarkable combination of God's grace and human spirit. Once in a while we get right; the church thrives sometimes in spite of our humanness but most of the time because we figure out that God's grace and the human spirit really can put it together. If Moses can lead an entire nation toward a promised land, if Jesus can start a even more remarkable movement we have come to call the church, if people can continue to put their trust in God we can, together, pull the church out its present malaise and thrive again. When we stand on the other side, we will see the church is indeed a resilient organization.

*A resilient congregation...*



---

<sup>1</sup> Robert E. Quinn, *Deep Change: Discovering the Leader Within*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996, p. 18.



## Chapter One

### What Leaders Do To Produce Resiliency

There are certain things leaders in congregations must do in order to stay resilient regardless of the circumstances.

***First, leaders must be willing to embark on a journey of deep change within them before attempting to change others.***

Too often change efforts in the church involve coercion or a slick sales job, assuming people don't know the difference or would not prefer an alternative. Even efforts that include others in participating in the process may not bring about transformative change. **The latest change theorists believe deep change in organizations will not happen until there is deep change within the leader.**<sup>2</sup> Since deep change will likely involve a dark night of the soul, it is also likely that we will ignore any need for personal deep change. Each of us has a story or we know of others who have experienced suffering and chaos only to enter a new order. For Christians this is the principle of death and resurrection.

Personal change in leaders may not always be as dramatic as the dark night of the soul. It may be that leaders are stuck in their assumptions of their own role, or are uncertain about what is needed in the organization, or what is expected of others. One of the early, clear signs for our need for personal change is when we see so clearly the need for change in others or when the actions of others “hook” us emotionally. Jesus said,

For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye when you do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly enough to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye (Matt 7:2-5).

The leadership challenge in negotiating change has been part of the story of faith since the time Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt and into the promised land. From the beginning Moses faced his own self-doubts when he responded to God's summons to Moses, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt” (Ex 3:11)? Moses negotiated change within himself before he was able to negotiate change within the people of Israel.

---

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Robert E. Quinn, *Deep Change: Discovering the Leader Within*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996; and *Change the World: How Ordinary People Can Accomplish Extraordinary Results*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000; See Chris Argyris, *Overcoming Organizational Defenses: Facilitating Organizational Learning*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990.

This change in Moses did not mean that the people automatically followed him because of this personal deep change. Leadership challenges for Moses continued. Shortly after Moses had negotiated his self doubts and managed to lead the congregation on freedom's trail from the slaves' existence in Egypt, "The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, 'If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger'" (Ex 16:2-3). How quickly the people's dispositions of freedom and anticipation can turn to whining protest, anxiety, and frustration, which will undoubtedly test the leaders' own dispositions and position on every issue related to change.

The important lesson from Moses is his willingness and ability to address his own resistance to change and confront his short-comings in order to effectively lead the nation into the promised land, a reality he saw from a distance. Though Moses never experienced the promised land, it remained the compelling force of his leadership vision. Healthy leaders can see where the church needs to go even if they will not be making the whole journey.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., another leader who sacrificed his life for a promised land vision he never experienced, has written about personal deep change in the middle of the night during the Montgomery bus boycott. After receiving a racist telephone call from someone threatening his life, King was filled with fear and self doubts. King recounts his midnight prayer, "I am here taking a stand for what I believe is right. But now I am afraid. The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they too will falter...." King went on to describe how God began to give him an inner calm as his fears began to pass from him. When his uncertainty disapated, he began to feel he could face anything, knowing that "God is able to give us the interior resources to face the storms and problems of life."<sup>3</sup> Today's environment requires leaders to lead toward a "new land" even though they may never arrive there themselves.

We recently met with a leader who had a dispute with city hall and a building program in their church. He was working relentlessly in changing city hall on behalf of the congregation. These problems and the time commitment they entailed were draining his energy and taking away from other priorities and pastoral effectiveness. At the same time, he saw no way for the board, trustees of the church, or other staff members to be involved in the negotiations with city hall. No

---

<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (J.M. Washington, ed.). New York: Harper & Row, 1986, p. 509.

one else could do this job. He would not think of relinquishing his own responsibility. Therefore, until he experiences change within himself, nothing else will change either.

***Second, leaders must be willing to embrace realities of the congregation and its environment by building upon the best of the past with God's dream for the future.***

People feel confident when they journey into the unknown by carrying known parts of the past with them that give energy and hope for the future.<sup>4</sup> The more traditional approach to change is to start with what is not working and what needs to be fixed. When we dwell on problems to be addressed, we not only find them, we began to see everything through their reality lens. However, in every congregation something is working, and the key role for leaders is to identify and capitalize on what is working in order to build upon it for the future. When we dwell on what gives energy and hope, these lenses become the reality. This is in sharp contrast to leaders who are infatuated by a particular success of the past or stuck on dwelling on deficits of the present – concentrating only on what is wrong with us!

How do leaders embrace the realities of the environment? The same reality one leader sees as a threat another leader sees as an opportunity. For example, the changing neighborhood is seen as a threat to a dwindling Anglo congregation; the same change is seen as an opportunity for another Anglo congregation willing to reach out, embrace, and do ministry with the new neighbors. This all too familiar scenario usually finds congregations in denial, afraid to let go of power and resources, and blaming the pastor or denominational system for their decline. Leaders of resilient congregations experience deep change within themselves, help congregations remember best practices from the past, and imagine God's dream for the future as the congregation moves through such turbulent, disconcerting times.

***Third, leaders must maximize discontinuity and embrace chaos in order to experience a new order.***

The successes of yesterday and today do not guarantee future successes. If the local congregation hasn't already experienced setbacks and surprises, then leaders have done an excellent job of not listening to the change in the environment or a poor job of listening to the new opportunities. These crises of discontinuity which feels chaotic can be God's prescription for recreation.

---

<sup>4</sup> Sue A. Hammond, *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry*. Plano, TX: Thin Book Publishing Company, 1996, p. 21.

Leaders in today's churches can no longer be satisfied with incremental steps toward change. If we do, we will continue to exponentially lag behind where we need to be in order to be responsive to our changing environments. Brian McLaren correctly states that "...our first strategy is to maximize discontinuity. That is to say, maybe small changes, superficial changes, were enough in the past, but the degree of change we are experiencing now is such that small measures, even a lot of them, aren't enough. Instead we need a major change, qualitative change, revolution, rebirth, reinvention, and not just once, but repeatedly for the foreseeable future."<sup>5</sup> As difficult as it may be, today's leader must embrace this discontinuity if a new order is ever to be realized. No church serious about its future is exempt from this reality of making quantum steps toward innovation and deep change.

In addition, chaos, which is swirling everywhere around us, must also be embraced for the sake of the new order that is only available, and waiting to be birthed, within the chaos. Common experiences of chaos include feeling out of control, helpless, and utter confusion. From a scientific perspective, chaos is not utter confusion but rather a constrained instability. Patterns of order and disorder emerge, and the system is highly sensitive to even small changes that can have a profound impact on the entire system. Thus, there are multiple possibilities for future directions.<sup>6</sup> Dee Hock coined a new word to explain this creative relationship between chaos and order: "chaordic... 1. the behavior of any self-governing organism, organization or system which harmoniously blends characteristics of order and chaos. 2. patterned in a way dominated by neither chaos or order. 3. characteristic of the fundamental organizing principles of evolution and nature."<sup>7</sup>

But chaos is too scary for most of us, especially when we see chaos and order as mutually exclusive and when there are expectations for us as leaders to have everything under control. The one who allows chaos is not seen as a leader. Therefore, we put our attention on equilibrium to keep things as they are – not on openness and creativity. Margaret J. Wheatley describes what happens when "...an open system seeks to establish equilibrium and stability through constraints on creativity and local changes, it creates the conditions that threaten its survival."<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Brian D. McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000, p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> Ralph D. Stacey, *Managing the Unknowable: Strategic Boundaries Between Order and Chaos in Organizations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992, p. 69.

<sup>7</sup> Dee Hock, *Birth of the Chaordic Age*. San Francisco: Berrett Koehler Publishers, 1999, on inside cover.

<sup>8</sup> Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Learning About Organization from an Orderly Universe*. San Francisco: Berrett Koehler, 1994, p. 98.

Churches would do well to look for and encourage the creativity that often lies dormant in its members. Parker Palmer describes this creative process as not the desire to solve, to succeed, or survive, but to give birth to something new.<sup>9</sup> Instead of restraining people in their gifts, leaders must look for new ways to unleash the passion and gifts of people who are more than willing to contribute when the expectations and stakes are high. The alternative to “fear filled” control is to embrace messy conditions that spark freedom and creativity to think new thoughts, to explore what we’ve never asked before, and to ponder what God is up to in this world, including our own church and community.<sup>10</sup> It is no wonder we are at best ambivalent about chaos. However, when we embrace it, we become free to try something new. Dee Hock captures this essence when he writes, “Given the right circumstances, from no more than dreams, determination, and the liberty to try, quite ordinary people consistently do extraordinary things.”<sup>11</sup>

We know of a church that experienced a long history of financial instability. Year after year, the finance committee struggled to meet the budget with insufficient income, an impossible task. The most recent pastor decided to interrupt this process of being the one who always solved the financial problems of the church. Together with his staff, he gave the problem back to the church by explaining it was their responsibility to solve the financial crisis, even if it meant cutting the staff. As you can imagine, this set off the church in wild frenzy. The topic of conversations for weeks was “What are we going to do about our financial problems? In the end, they decided to make a new appeal to the congregation to raise more money, keep the staff, and maintain current obligations. When it was over, the leaders reported that the process of the congregation taking responsibility for the long-standing financial problem felt stressful, anxious, and un-nerving. This was necessary in order for the congregation to experience a new “financial order.” The new order came out of the chaos experienced by lay leaders scrambling around and trying to solve the problem by the pastor who remained non-anxious while letting the chaos happen.

Ralph D. Stacey believes that “Without such instability, the system will be incapable of developing new, innovative forms of behavior. It will be trapped into endlessly repeating its past and present behavior.”<sup>12</sup> The church – which was initiated during an experience of freedom, self-organizing spontaneity, and creativity at Pentecost – has become a machine-like metaphor

---

<sup>9</sup> Parker J. Palmer, *The Active Life: A Spirituality of Work, Creativity, and Caring*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990, 9.

<sup>10</sup> The same spark in a non-anxious group that leads to creativity may in an anxious group lead to an explosion.

<sup>11</sup> Dee Hock, *Birth of the Chaordic Age*. San Francisco: Berrett Koehler Publishers, 1999, p. 192.

<sup>12</sup> Ralph D. Stacey, *Managing the Unknowable: Strategic Boundaries Between Order and Chaos in Organizations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992, pp. 46-47.

sounding more like the of assembly line expectations representative of the Industrial Revolution where creatures of order and predictability were required. Instability and chaos – instead of order, control, and predictability – are required for today’s church to break out of its straight jacket of restraints to move freely toward new possibilities. Today’s environment is so turbulent that only radical, deep change will create the future; for most of us this will mean experiencing chaos – the only path that allows a new order. It is the “chaordic” church, open to the possibilities of God’s ways, that will make a way for its own future by finding new ways in which its deepest joy, peace, love and hope can connect to the world’s deepest needs.

***Fourth, leaders must remain non-anxious and persistent in a highly anxious, emotionally charged environment.***

Incremental change is not always easy; deep change is even more difficult and often sets off waves of anxiety that begin to infiltrate and influence the entire system – this is normal and to be expected. Any change will influence the system to return to the way things used to be. The anxiety produced by change will eventually find its way back to the leaders, especially the pastor. Leaders cannot lead change efforts on “automatic pilot.” Leaders often respond to change with over-reactive anxiety and minimal self-awareness, falling back on previously familiar patterns that were not effective in leading congregations through change in the first place.

Few are clearer on emotional systems than Edwin H. Friedman, who described the emotional reactivity of congregations and its impact upon leaders:

“As America’s emotional regression has deepened, the clergy of every denomination have been increasingly thrust into a panicky game of musical chairs, as each minister leaves one disappointed congregation only to be eagerly snatched up by another in the false hope that this new one will be better than the last, who, in the meantime, has now found a new opportunity to be a displacement focus for a congregation that had been disaffected by its previous minister, presently about to take the place of the first, the anxiety still unabated and the focused issues still unresolved.”<sup>13</sup>

**Therefore, the more a pastor can remain non-anxious and calming, the more he or she will influence the emotional climate of the entire system to remain non-anxious. The importance of the leader’s non-anxious presence creates a climate in which the gifts and wisdom of the entire congregation can be more freely released. Here’s the rub – being non-anxious is perhaps the most difficult quality of the pastor whose financial well-being is tied to the very system he or she is trying to change. These interlocking systems are confusing and messy. What is true for pastors is**

---

<sup>13</sup> Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*. Bethesda, MD: The Edwin Friedman Estate/Trust, 1999, p. 100.

true for all leaders of the congregation – the more non-anxious presence there is in the system, the more likely healthy change is possible.

Remaining non-anxious is made even more difficult as the leader also stays connected to the resistance from pockets in the congregation. Whether or not these individuals or groups are well meaning makes little difference. Staying connected by embracing resistance is an act of mature leadership. Sometimes the resistance can take the form of maliciousness that kills the messenger; at other times, the resistance is against the new idea itself. Sometimes people resist and they do not know why – they just resist. An effective leader will not only embrace the resistance, but monitors how he or she is contributing to the resistance in others.

Rick Maurer makes an interesting observation about resistance, “Most people hate resistance. The mere mention of the word unleashes a torrent of negative thoughts – fear, opposition, conflict, hassles, pain, annoyance, anger, and suspicion. Because it is viewed so negatively, people want to get over it. ... People want to overcome resistance. This view is wrong.”<sup>14</sup> Wise leaders know how to remain connected to people who express resistance, search the hidden truth often in the resistance, are open to their own contribution to others’ resistance, and stay resolved to the big picture view. Leaders are open to adjustments from resistance because of their merit, but never as a response to the anxiety.

Leaders who embrace resistance and work with change as an emotional reality still need to be persistent. Leaders will rise to the challenge of change with new ideas only to be beaten down by well-meaning members who are not yet willing to change or have not yet been compelled by the vision to move forward.

The agenda of anxiety-driven pockets must not thwart the progress toward God’s dream for the congregation’s preferred future. It is often at this time when leaders cave in to the pressures of conformity, keep things the way they have always been, or to become even more reactive and more anxious. When leaders become more anxious, they may be triggered to light the match in a gas filled room – explosions hurt people. To be more intentional in leading change, leaders must possess self-awareness and, at times, take uncommon stands on issues of important concern, while staying in touch with the feelings, aspirations and resistances of the congregation. If anxiety is not confronted and dealt with, all change efforts will languish, and the congregation will stay stuck – unable to participate in the re-creation process. As Paul said,

---

<sup>14</sup> Rick Maurer, *Beyond the Wall of Resistance: Unconventional Strategies that Build Support for Change*. Austin, TX: Bard Books, Inc., 1996, p. 33.

“I consider that the sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. . . . We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves” (Romans 5: 18, 22).

Re-creation will not happen when chronic anxiety pervades every aspect of the congregation’s life – the size and type of change is irrelevant, for all change exhibits an emotional quality. Re-creation is possible for congregations when anxiety is overcome by the capacity of leaders to see the “glory about to be revealed.”

***Fifth, leaders must develop their inner life.***

The inner life is a mixed bag where we confront the depths of joy, happiness, love and peace as well as anger, fear, envy, and dependencies – to name a few. It is no wonder why this is the most rewarding and most difficult journey one can take – to “ride the monsters all the way down.”<sup>15</sup> If we do take this ride, we will learn the necessary integration of our public persona with our interior life. Leadership theorists and practitioners are no longer ignoring this crucial element of the leader’s life. Peter Vaill expresses this neglect when he writes, “We cannot afford the luxury of silence about the spiritual condition of our leaders. They themselves are experiencing stresses at a deep personal level which many of them cannot cope with; and they are taking action in their organizations that reflect their fragile and embattled spiritual condition.”<sup>16</sup>

This should be self-evident to a profession that deals with the souls of persons. Unfortunately, it is not. Even the church is too often a spiritual wasteland described by Danah Zohar, “In many ways this spiritual desert has come about as a product of our high human IQ. We have reasoned ourselves away from nature and our fellow creatures, and we have reasoned ourselves beyond religion.”<sup>17</sup> When one is in a spiritual desert, one looks for the kind of water that will give life – God’s replacement for enabling us to give up our tenacious investment in illusions and for providing the cure for our disillusionment.<sup>18</sup> For the leaders of any congregation this is found in a search for God and the meaning of God in each person’s life. The most significant question today’s church leader might ask is, “What are God’s thoughts of me?”

When answering that question, leaders can look toward the classical spiritual disciplines of prayer, reflecting on scripture, fasting, solitude, and simplicity to find the answers. Slowing down to reflect on one’s inner life is difficult as it leads to deep inner change. There is within

---

<sup>15</sup> See Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk: Expeditions and Encounters*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1982.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Vaill, *Spiritual Leading and Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998, p. 217.

<sup>17</sup> Danah Zohar. *Spiritual Intelligence: The Ultimate Intelligence*. NY: Bloomsbury Publ., 2000, p. 22.



each of us a deep call to go beyond ourselves as we seek meaning for our life. This call comes from God who calls to us through enormous, boundless love and grace. **The leader that takes time to listen to this inner call will also develop an experience of being loved by a power so complete and fulfilling that it can't help but change the leader.** When this happens, then leaders in the church will also be ready to lead change in others – but not until then. Churches today have too many leaders who want to be prophets without doing the necessary work of prayer and self-reflection. Even Jesus knew the value of being alone and getting away from it all.

Another key component of the inner life is the leader's **ability to be in covenantal community with a few trusted friends and colleagues.** This is the model Jesus employed – spending quality time in a small community. To those in closest relationship, Jesus expressed personal agony, “I am deeply grieved, even to death” (Mark 34b). To whom can we express our deepest fears and failures? To whom can we share our temptations as well as hopes and dreams, shattered or yet strong? With whom can we enjoy the best of times? With whom do we have no fear of judgment? The community does for our faith what we cannot do for it alone. Walter Brueggemann expresses two temptations that can stand in the way of an authentic covenantal relationship: “On the one hand, to grow so close that one disappears into the other. On the other hand, to grow so distant that other has no voice in the self. Either way is death . . . . The dominant agenda of spirituality is to keep covenant, to live in the tension between freedom and community.”<sup>19</sup>

A covenant community not only provides support needed for leaders as they manage the difficulties of leading deep change, but also provides accountability. “Get going” or “Keep going” are often just the right words leaders need to hear to continue their quest – not only toward inner change but also toward the change they are leading within the congregation.

***Sixth, leaders must be able to articulate appreciative questions that will enable the congregation's story and dialogue to align the best of the past with a God-given dream for the future.***

Take time to reflect on the problems you are encountering in your life and congregation. Then take some time to reflect on the ways God is at work in your life and congregation. What words would you use to describe the difference inside of you and in your response? The point of this exercise is to understand how our interior dialogue creates our realities. If we focus only on

---

<sup>18</sup> See Parker J. Palmer, *The Active Life: A Spirituality of Work, Creativity, and Caring*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990, pp. 25-26.

<sup>19</sup> Walter Brueggemann, “Covenantal Community,” *New Conversations* 2, 3 (Winter 1977); 4-9. Published by The United Church Board for Homeland Ministries.

what is wrong in our congregations, we act upon that reality. At times we become so focused on the problems that we are unable to see anything God might be doing. When we focus on what is “life giving,” then that becomes our reality. This is not to say that we deny problems or see through a Pollyannaish lens. It does mean that resiliency happens in large part because of the way we see realities and respond to them. When reading the story of the Prodigal, one can see this story primarily through the lens of sinful decision, failure, jealousy, and pain. One can also see the story through the lens of letting go, irresistible grace, reconciliation, and coming home.

Even when we experience frustration and struggle, such as decline in a particular ministry, we can ask appreciative questions that provide inspiration and aspiration instead of dwelling on what is wrong. For example, we might ask, “When was this ministry at its very best?” “When were you most proud to be part of this ministry? Tell me a story about this time.” “What might God be dreaming for this ministry?” “What is the legacy of this ministry?” “Is this ministry wanting to be reborn?”

Articulating appreciative questions is a new, exciting, and fresh way to help people reflect on what is working in the church instead of what is wrong with the church. To build on what is already working, instead of focusing on deficits or problems, enables the congregation’s story to emerge as inspiring and hope-filled. For example, asking questions that help people talk about what makes them proud to be a member of their congregation or help them reflect on a story that illustrates a time when they received great benefit by belonging to their congregation can be a dramatic exercise for leaders and the whole congregation. Learning the discipline of asking positive questions will do more than bring out the best in people and organizations, such questions will amplify life-giving possibilities for the future.<sup>20</sup>

Hope is a necessary disposition for leadership, and it must remain strong in order to provide an alternative to the congregation’s own resistance and frustration. It takes uncanny hope for leaders to stand up in the face of sabotage and discontent. What makes this crucial to any congregation’s future is that the present reality of a congregation will also greatly impact all future realities. If the congregation sees only the threat of change, it will eventually stagnate, atrophy, and die. On the other hand, if the congregation has the ability to see any glimpse of

---

<sup>20</sup> Diana Whitney, David Cooperrider, Amanda Trosten-Bloom, and Brian S. Kaplin. *Encyclopedia of Positive Questions: Volume One. Using Appreciative Inquiry to Bring Out the Best in Your Organization*. Euclid, OH: Lakeshore Communications, 2002, p. vii. For an introduction to Appreciative Inquiry, see Charles Elliott, *Locating the Energy for Change: An Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry*. Winnepeg, Manitoba: International Institute of Sustainable Development, 1999; and David L. Cooperrider, Peter F. Sorensen, Jr., Diana Whitney, and Therese F. Yaeger, eds., *Appreciative Inquiry: Rethinking Human Organization Toward A Positive Theory Of Change*. Champaign, IL: Stipes Publishing, 2000.

opportunity for change, it has the chance to survive and perhaps even transform itself into a re-creation full of God's Spirit.

***Seventh, leaders must be willing to embrace the value and realities of team building in order to involve the gifts of many needed for deep change.***

Being the lone leader eventually became too burdensome for Moses whose father-in-law addressed this issue by telling him, "What you are doing is not good. You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone...If you do this, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people will go to their home in peace" (Exodus 18:18, 23).

How many of us experience the very best of team building experiences? If so, do they happen within the church? **With all the rhetoric on community and team building, church leaders still have the tendency to be solo leaders. This means the leader will carry the burden and anxiety alone, will not have limited opportunities to bounce** around new and outrageous ideas, and will not have the benefit of individuals who have their own positive circle of influence to help lead the congregation through un-chartered waters.

While the church has not always been the first place people look to in order to learn about team building, this is a non-negotiable for leaders of resilient churches. This is one of the first steps of leaders who desire to lead resilient congregations – to find those resilient persons who are ready to embark on a journey of change regardless of the degree of threat in people or in the circumstances. To embark on resiliency in congregations without a team is to lessen its success and to increase the possibility of failure and/or strain and stress on our body, mind, soul, and spirit. Jesus knew the benefits and consequences of working with and trusting his disciples. Even with strained and even failed relationships, he would not give up forming a discipleship team and trusting them to carry out the mission to the world. A leadership team is a preferred alternative to going it alone and it will increase the likelihood of resiliency.

***Last, leaders must be willing to learn the gifts and process of group discernment.***

**Leaders who are part of teams will naturally want to learn the skills of group discernment. Group discernment can be done in a variety** of ways: facts related to a decision can be presented, discussed in order to listen to the voice of God, work toward unity rather than a majority rule, and giving the decision over to nothing other than the will of God.

Leaders who truly believe in the dynamics of teams have already learned the benefit of engaging in dialogue in order to achieve wisdom that is not as readily accessible to individual

reflection. Dialogue comes from a Greek word, *dialogos*, meaning the word passing or moving through the [community]. Dialogue is a process whereby the participants engage with one another in order to express one's own view while being able to suspend that view in order to truly hear the views of other colleagues. Collegueship is not blind agreement or sharing the same views; rather the real power is to see the value of differences that can be expressed so that individual viewpoints may be altered, if not radically changed, in listening to the differences. This could not happen unless team members were able to suspend their assumptions in order to listen to others. This process is what Peter M. Senge calls the discipline of team learning.<sup>21</sup> Without a facilitator, we are prone to employ discussion and speeches, not dialogue.

With team members who have very different mindsets, how can a group discern God's will for them? How can a group honoring individual viewpoints employ a process whereby they can agree on direction and important decisions? This is the subject of group discernment, a process long practiced in the Christian tradition.

There are many scriptures that deal with discernment that guide us in the group discernment process. An important assumption of discernment is the belief that God is willing to communicate God's will to a group, not only the individual. The writer of Deuteronomy puts it this way many generations ago:

Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?" Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us that we may hear it and observe it?" No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe" (30:11-14).

God's Word is near to God's people in their mouths and hearts ready to be expressed for direction, comfort, and challenge. At the same time, people must be willing to listen in order to hear God's word. The first generation of church leaders practiced a discerning process with the entire congregation at the Jerusalem Council to determine a most important mission question: who can belong to our congregation? The leaders' testimony of personal experience, scriptures, prayer, and sharp disagreements were a few of the necessary ingredients for direction to come into view.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, writing from the context of an underground seminary, puts forward the notion that God puts the Word of Jesus Christ into the mouth of persons in order to communicate this word to others; therefore we should seek the Word in the witness of others.

---

<sup>21</sup> See Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Arts & Practice of The Learning Organization*. New York: Doubleday Currency, 1990, pp. 238-257.

More specifically, Bonhoeffer, relies on the strength of the community and vulnerability of the leader when he writes, “The Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother; his own heart is uncertain, his brother’s is sure.”<sup>22</sup> The lesson from this band of brothers for us is that we need each other to seek and to discern the will of God.

Group discernment is an on-going process of employing individual prayer, reflection, and preparation with opportunity for group prayer, reflection, and dialogue. This dialectic process continues until a decision emerges that brings about peace regarding the decision and direction. Sometimes the direction is clear; other times the direction is to wait. In both instances there is peace, which is a clear sign of effective group discernment.<sup>23</sup>

*In sum, what leaders do to produce resiliency...*

- *Leaders must be willing to embark on a journey of deep change for themselves before attempting to change others.*
- *Leaders must be willing to embrace realities of the congregation and its environment by building upon the best of the past with God’s dream for the future.*
- *Leaders must maximize discontinuity and embrace chaos in order to experience a new order.*
- *Leaders must remain non-anxious and persistent in a highly anxious, emotionally charged environment.*
- *Leaders must develop the inner life.*
- *Leaders must be able to articulate appreciative questions that will enable the congregation’s story and dialogue to align the best of the past with a God-given dream for the future.*
- *Leaders must be willing to embrace the value and realities of team building in order to involve the gifts of many needed for deep change.*
- *Leaders must be willing to learn the gifts and process of group discernment.*

---

<sup>22</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*. New York: Harper & Row, 1954, p. 23.

<sup>23</sup> More specific processes are described in Appendix X.

## Chapter Two

### Dispositions of Congregations: Launching

Congregations can experience resiliency in the face of the most threatening circumstances. How do individuals and entire congregations change their attitude from “How will we ever survive?” to “Let’s go for it!”? In all change efforts, it is essential that leaders employ appropriate intervention strategies designed to enable the entire congregation to embrace healthy experimentation and change designed to move the congregation toward its God-given destiny.

This book outlines the strategies as well as makes suggestions for which strategies are appropriate for a given reality. We call these realities “dispositions.” The strategies which are appropriate for each disposition become clearer as one enters into a time of reflection and discernment.

The congregation’s disposition is the tendency or inclination to act in a particular way that will benefit their well-being and long term future. Why do some congregations act in ways that are self-defeating while others act in ways that enhance their mission and effectiveness? More specifically, what influences congregations to be resilient in the face of adversity and then take action necessary to overcome such circumstances? It is the willingness and ability to recognize the need and the readiness to take the initial steps to recognize and to embrace the opportunities. The following are four distinct dispositions congregations can embrace to carry out their ministries and enable the congregation to be more resilient.

The dispositions of resilient congregations are *launching*, *expanding*, *deepening*, and *pruning*. As you reflect upon these dispositions, you will likely discover that your congregation tends to embrace a particular disposition or you may find yourself embracing more than one. You may also identify certain ministries within the congregation that are more at home with some more than others. It could be that one particular ministry or many ministries within a congregation seem ‘stuck’ and lack the leadership qualities necessary to move beyond denial or resistance.

## THE DISPOSITIONS OF CONGREGATIONS

Disposition	Must Pay Attention To	Danger Zone
Launching	Vision	Over-dependence on leader
Expanding	Community Outreach	Church is an exclusive club
Deepening	Spirituality	Over emphasis on structure: “You’re perfectly designed to get the results you are getting”
Pruning	Discern present reality/ Cultivate new growth	Failure of nerve to move out of comfort zones

### *Introduction*

The disposition of launching is setting a congregation in motion so that it is ready to engage in ministry. It is like pushing a vessel into the water so that it is ready to sail, or as described in the story of Jesus calling his first disciples: “[Jesus] got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, ‘Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch’” (Luke 5:3-4). This act of faith is not a one-time occurrence. To launch into un-chartered waters is a continual call to individuals and congregations who are committed to respond to Christ.

### *Definition of Launching*

Launching is an exciting experience, much like that which Moses and the Children of Israel must have experienced when they planted their first steps into the waters of the Red Sea. The launching disposition is electric with anticipation and eagerness – the people have an optimistic view of the future and are drunk with the savor of new life and adventure ahead.

But launching does not come without preparation, resistance, and sometimes introspection and questioning, “Why me, why us?” Launching may include a long gestation period that is needed for the congregation to get used to the new possibility or to make preparations for a new dream. The spirituality of launching does not necessarily follow a strict chronological time line. It took forty years for Israel to launch into their dream of the Promised

Land, while it took one night of fishing to launch out with Jesus in an entirely new reality. After the big catch that broke their nets, “they brought their boats to shore, [and] left everything to follow him” (Luke 5:11).

Launching into the deep waters required a simple act of trust and obedience to the one who had invited them to the new journey, after toiling day and night without any sign of success. For the disciples, there were no guarantees that their launching efforts into a new and untested ministry would bear fruit. Launching congregations see reality that other congregations cannot see. If you never launch, you can never *see*.

Launching congregations are frontier oriented. They see possibilities for new ministry around every corner. The motto of the launching congregation is, “God has given us a new opportunity. The promise lies before us. It is ours for the taking. It is *here*, and it is *now!*” The congregation is now poised to redefine needs as opportunities. Mission is an opportunity, not an obligation. The question of the launching congregation becomes, “What can we do *now* to meet the needs of others?” This zeal stands in sharp contrast to congregations that do little or nothing to serve the needs of its community and who may, in fact, disdain mission opportunities. However, the launching congregation recognizes that its vitality depends upon its commitment and ability to identify and carry out mission opportunities.

### *Three Critical Components of the Launching Disposition*

- The vision which is propelling the church to launch, whether it be a new church or a new ministry;
- Over-dependence on the leader is the danger zone/stuck area;
- Keeping the vision alive until it captures the imagination of founding members is critical in new congregations;

### *Leadership*

Effective leaders in a launching congregation are risk oriented, have a thirst for adventure, and will try things that are new and innovative. Launching leaders are traditionally described as charismatic; they possess high expectations for themselves and for others and attract others to a cause that will make a positive difference in the world. Leaders, who are able to articulate a compelling vision, will energize the aspirations and actions of the launching congregation. Like Moses, launching leaders may spend decades pursuing a God-given vision with persistence and faith.



The charisma of launching leaders creates an atmosphere of energy, vitality, expectancy, and confidence. Leadership in a newly launched church is critical for the success of the new church start. People often join a new church because they are drawn to the charisma of the pastor. This can be both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, a leader's charisma is exactly what is needed in order to attract new people to the church; on the other hand, a co-dependency with the leader and founding families can also quickly develop, which thwarts the maturity and growth of emerging leaders. When a co-dependency develops the key to overcome it is to develop more leaders, not more followers.

### *Spirituality*

Spirituality is an exciting adventure in the launching setting. Vision, the excitement of being part of something new, and building new relationships get played out in new congregations. Be careful, however, not to make spirituality an individualistic phenomenon with little emphasis on reaching out to the community. In other words, the excitement of being part of something new can be so exhilarating that people and even leaders forget their reason for being...to reach out to new populations. To overcome this, leaders can emphasize the spiritual disciplines as a means of grace to ensure that all members grow spiritually, embrace a sense of mission, and catch a vision for the future of the church.

### *Risk and Innovation*

Leaders in launching churches or newly launched ministries inspire others to be risk oriented and free to try new, innovative ministries. The leader who does not possess a strong love for adventure will be hard-pressed to maintain interest in starting something from scratch. Launching leaders need the thrill of finding new ways to do new things. This might mean starting a completely new church or it might mean something simpler like creating something new from what already exists. Launch leaders also do not have to have success at every turn in order to justify their attempt at starting new ministries. They recognize the value of risk as a learning tool. If one ministry fails, they will learn from it and try again.

A potential danger zone for launching leaders is to become blindly committed to the rules for success taken from former church experiences and expect them to work in the new setting. This can especially be true if the new church has a large number of members with previous church experience. They often expect that what worked well in their former setting will work just as well in their new setting, forgetting that the new setting is trying to reach a completely new set of people or is not interested in the same results the former setting was producing. Wise

launching pastors are not quick to add members from other churches because they often bring with them a set of expectations that are not relevant in the new setting. Another potential pitfall, especially in existing congregations, is to attempt to copy the latest fad from another growing church. Copying from successful models alone will not work. Just because one church experiences success with a particular program is no guarantee that it will have the same success in another church. A good rule of thumb is to look at the principles of successful congregations and apply them where they can have the highest potential for success in another setting.

### *Mission*

Mission is lived out in the here and now as new frontiers are explored and reached. The danger that often accompanies this is that founding families in launching congregations are unable to develop a sense of common mission and outreach or are unwilling to share power with new members. To overcome these leaders must revisit the original vision that launched the church or new ministries. Leaders can ask, “Does this vision still make sense today? If so, what needs to be done to bring it to reality? If not, what needs to change?”

### *Gift-oriented Ministry*

A good time to do gift assessment is as new members come to the launching church with all of their enthusiasm and excitement. The sooner this is done the better the chance of avoiding the danger zone for launching congregations, leaders who carry too much of the load. Therefore, equip every member for ministry. Emphasize the calling, passion, and giftedness of each person in contrast to cultivating a new congregation of on-lookers who are unwilling to be involved in ministry. Any number of gift assessment resources can be used to help people understand their giftedness and how to employ their gifts to strengthen the ministry of the church.

Once gift assessment is accomplished, then begin to build team based ministry groups to achieve the ministry desires that are emerging. Team based ministry is different from committees in that the goal of a team is to accomplish a task by utilizing the gifts of the team. Launching leaders will make team building one of the priorities of their ministry. What can be said about how much more fulfilled people feel by using their gifts for ministry can also be said when those same people are doing so in the context of a team.

### *The Priority*

The clear overall priority of a new congregation is the development of a core group; a community of new “founders” who have a shared mission and vision with the leadership. Many

congregations who make their launching dependent on a launch Sunday by attempting to attract a huge crowd, report that eventually the “crowd” must become a “core” in order to build commitment to the newly formed ministry. We believe it is advantageous for a new church, a newly launched ministry, or a new mission focus to start with a core group, even if it takes several weeks or months to achieve.

Recruiting an original core group to provide the critical mass for a launching congregation is a major concern for leaders and the congregation’s future. People who join the congregation during the launching disposition create the identity for generations to come – these boundaries will attract or repel future potential members. It is essential, therefore, that the launching congregation be comprised of a cross section of people who are reflected in the community. If any group is relegated to the sidelines during the launching disposition, it will stay on the sidelines long after the church is founded. For example, if the fledging congregation hopes to have young people involved, then involve them immediately. This must be done before they get the idea that “In this church young people watch from the sidelines – that younger generations are welcome as long as they don’t interfere with the way things are! Only the older generations do important things.” If this becomes a reality, the children and young people – after becoming adults – will continue to sit on the sidelines or leave, and the church will lose the gifts and imagination of entire generations. What is true about age is true about other issues of diversity.

One danger to watch out for is founding families who begin to view mission as internal instead of outreach. Even new congregations need to emphasize the mission questions:

- Who are we?
- Why do we exist?
- What do we want to be known for in our community?
- What are the pressing changes that must happen in our community?
- Does our congregation’s priorities in ministry connect with the timeless values of the scriptures and the timely opportunities in the community?

### *DNA*

Crucial to the launching disposition is the reality of establishing the congregation’s DNA – the founding vision, values, attitudes, behaviors, successes, and failures remain in the congregation forever in one form or another.<sup>24</sup> For example, if a congregation is launched with a

---

<sup>24</sup> What we mean by DNA is the inter-generational transmission of values and other important elements of the founding generation. See Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*. New York: Guilford Press, 1985.

belief system that ministry is for professionals and not lay people, then this will be an issue with which the congregation will constantly wrestle. Not paying attention to the DNA at the very inception of the congregation will mean paying attention to it forever – in struggle and conflict rather than spirit and life. Considering the DNA must be intentional for the launching congregation to insure long-term vitality.

### *Structure*

During the launching disposition the organizational design tends to be fluid. The formality of the structure is not emphasized and at times may seem chaotic. However, chaos may be the necessary ingredient to commitment and clarity in the launching congregation, remembering that chaos is a prerequisite to seeking a newly established order.

### *The Community*

The goal of the new congregation is to reach new populations that are not being reached by existing congregations or because of population growth are reaching new communities where there is little or no church presence. Therefore, the entire emphasis is on reaching the community for Christ. It is amazing, however, how quickly the new church can begin to focus on itself, either because of internal conflict or such as a building issue or a theological issue. When this happens, it is important for the leaders to go back to the original mission and renew their commitment to the community perhaps by investing time in community activities or by engaging in new outreach programs.

### *Launching and the Existing Congregation*

The launching disposition, though natural for a newly established congregation, is a necessary outlook for all congregations. Launching new ministries is critical for on-going congregational life and vitality. Not only a characteristic of health, launching also is a means to getting healthy and staying healthy. Without this disposition, congregations are prone to stagnation and will wither away, ending up on the denomination's list of recent closures. It is not easy to launch new ministries especially when communities change and no longer reflect the existing membership. What is required are leaders who are willing to discern God in the midst of confusion and anxiety and are able to provide new ministries that will reach the community. In a continuously changing world, a specific change congregations must employ is the willingness and ability to launch new ministries that connect with the needs of the community. Like trimming the sails and getting the ship ready, the disposition to launch will set in motion an exciting adventure

for the congregation, regardless of how high the waves, how deep the water, or how fierce the winds.

Existing congregations who are attempting to start new ministries often have a peculiarly difficult time ensuring that the new ministry does not get lost on frivolous, petty bickering or meaningless power struggles. Often a vision for a new ministry idea is planted within the heart of a member, support for the idea is gained from the leadership. Once the leaders grant support (hopefully this is nothing more than permission giving) then the new ministry can be launched by either one or two individuals, or better yet with a team in place. A problem often arises when new ideas for ministry are born within the hearts of well-meaning, God-gifted individuals only to have the idea beaten down by a cumbersome structure that makes new ministries adhere to rules and regulations that have more to do with control than with reaching new populations.

The disposition of launching in the existing congregation can take on a variety of forms. The form is actually secondary to the fact that all congregations must launch new ministries in order to stay fresh for their existing membership as well as relevant to the needs of the community. Some likely launching activities in an existing congregation include:

- create a new vision statement that has a grass-roots flavor, i.e. includes a broad-based listening process
- enlist members for new ministries to reach out to new populations that have not here-to-fore been reached
- merge with an existing congregation to start a completely new church
- hire an additional staff person who can focus on a unique segment of the population in the community or start a new ministry
- launch a new congregation in a nearby community

The following are summary characteristics, danger zones, and leadership interventions to help a congregation negotiate the launching disposition.

### **Launching Characteristics**

	<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Danger Zone/Stuck Areas</i>	<i>Leadership Interventions</i>
Three Critical Components	Vision	Over dependence on leader	Keep the vision alive until it captures the imagination of founding members
Leadership	The charisma of leaders create an atmosphere of energy, vitality, expectancy, and confidence	Leadership develops co-dependence with congregation/founding families	Develop leadership by producing more leaders, not more followers

Spirituality	Spirituality is played out in vision, faith, and adventure	Spirituality becomes an individualistic phenomenon with little emphasis on reaching out. There is no balance between the inner and outer dimensions of the spiritual disciplines	Emphasize the spiritual disciplines – as a means of grace to ensure that all members grow spiritually, embrace a sense of mission, and catch a vision for the future of the church
Risk and Innovation	Leaders inspire others to be risk oriented and free to try new, innovative ministries	The group is blindly committed to the rules for success taken from former church experiences or from copying the latest fad from other growing churches	Increase the visibility of the church throughout the entire community by every means possible. Reputation of service is more effective than advertising campaigns
Mission	Mission is lived out in new frontiers here and now	Founding church families are unable to develop a sense of common mission and outreach or are unwilling to share power with new members	Revisit the original vision which launched the church or new ministry. Does this vision still make sense today? If so, what needs to be done to bring it into reality? If not, what needs to change?
Gift-oriented Ministry	People are excited to be part of something that is new and unknown	Leaders, especially the pastor, feel pressures of carrying too much of the load	Equip every member for ministry. Emphasize the calling, passion, and giftedness of each one. This is in contrast to viewing people as willing and capable volunteers vs. unable and/or unwilling onlookers.  Use effective gift assessment resources to help people understand their giftedness, and how to employ their gifts to strengthen the ministry of the church.  Give emphasis to team building and conflict management.
Priority	The priority is to develop a community of new “founders” who have mission and vision	Founding church families begin to view mission as internal instead of outreach, and may still be unwilling to share power with new members	Continuously emphasize mission questions: Who are we? Why do we exist? What do we want to be known for in our community? What are pressing changes that must happen in our community? Does our congregation’s priorities in ministry connect with the timeless values of scriptures and the timely opportunities in the community?
DNA	DNA begins to deepen/take root consciously or unconsciously	DNA is already showing signs for future conflict	Work through conflict issues of the DNA as they arise among members of the founding church families
Structure	It is impossible not to have structure - there are countless ways of “dividing” and “coordinating” ministries in a local congregation. Each choice makes an important statement	Develop a formal structure too early that chokes energy and spirit rather than inspires commitment to new ministries	Develop small task force groups to be responsible for various ministries. Have one overarching team to provide oversight to fulfilling ministry dreams and mission
Community	Entire emphasis is on reaching the community for Christ	Church begins to focus on itself either because of internal conflict – such as a new facilities issue or theological issue	Keep the community engaged by participating in community activities.
Vision	Growing a new church	Growing a church like the one new members remember leaving	Keep the vision ever before the newly forming congregation. All publications should include descriptions of the vision, as an example.

## Chapter Three

### Dispositions of Congregations: Expanding

#### *Introduction*

Led by missionaries the early church experienced dramatic expansion throughout the Middle East and eventually as far as Rome (Acts 28). During this expansion the early church was on the move – expanding its borders, adherents, and leadership. Leadership development played a major role in the expansion of the early church – Paul teamed up with Timothy and Silas, and Barnabus traveled with John Mark. These new leadership teams are an indication that the early church was intentional about choosing additional leaders who could keep the movement going.

But the early church's high hopes during its launching disposition were soon tested with problems and setbacks. It is not surprising that, when a congregation is expanding, it will likely experience conflict, sometimes significant disagreement. The Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15) included no small dissension and debate over an identity and mission issue regarding the explosive expansion of the early church among Gentile followers. This expansion heretofore did not happen without injury, conflict, and death: Ananias and Sapphira were severely judged because of their deception; apostles were imprisoned at the hand of a jealous sect of Sadducees; Stephen was arrested and stoned; Saul's breathing threat against the disciples before his conversion; Herod laid "violent hands upon some who belonged to the church"; and James, the brother of John, who was killed by the sword at Herod's command – to name a few. From our vantage point, these setbacks did not concede the mission of the early expanding congregation, though some followers sincerely believed the inclusion of Gentiles at that time – who were not circumcised according to the custom of Moses – certainly compromised their congregation's identity and mission. Nor did these setbacks stifle the unfailing energy and depth of commitment of early church leaders as they reframed any suffering as a worthy sacrifice for the cause of consolation and salvation of the new congregations (I Cor 1:6). There was no denial or cover up of the suffering. Paul continues in his letter to the church in Corinth: "for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death so that we would rely not on ourselves but on God who raises from the dead" (1:8b-9). Expansion does not come without costs and resistances, but with the redemptive grace of refining our calling and purpose.

### *Definition of the Expanding Disposition*

The expanding disposition is a crucial moment of truth in the life of a congregation; the new congregation must expand or it will atrophy. But it must expand by staying faithful to its mission in a changing marketplace. Without connecting its reason-for-being outside the church walls, it will either become stagnant or turn in upon itself and revert to the characteristics of the thousands of congregations that clutter the landscape as those that almost succeeded – but didn't. A key issue for the expanding congregation is whether or not to include people who are different. The alternative is to be entrenched in exclusivity.

### *Three Critical Components of the Expanding Disposition*

The three critical components of the Expanding disposition are:

- Community outreach in order that the church reflect the needs in the community;
- The church becomes a closed system similar to an exclusive club;
- Keep adding new leaders to new, growing ministries.

### *Leadership in the Expanding Disposition*

Leaders in the expanding disposition work tirelessly toward growth and inspiring others toward a vision that is becoming a possibility. As was true in the launching disposition, leaders in the expanding, growth dispositions also gain support for their vision because of their charisma and energy for outreach to the community. The leaders are still seen as key to the growth of the church but at the same time if leadership is not quickly nurtured and expanded to include others, then problems will eventually emerge. Initially, leaders begin to believe their “press releases” as they begin to see themselves as invincible. When this happens watch for something called the, “success syndrome.” Another problem to watch out for as the leaders continue to experience success is the inevitable competition for limited resources that often results. Leaders must not compete for all the resources in order to compliment their own needs for success to the detriment of others, who also need some of the same resources. For example, a staff member who needs people resources in order to do ministry should be aware of the people who are also being asked to fulfill other ministries within the church. While this can typically happen, the same competent person wears several hats in a variety of leadership roles.

As with the first congregation, not everyone, including not every leader, who has committed their ideas and energies to the new congregation has the same ideas about future priorities and direction, how the church should be structured, what its new, untested ministries and programs should be, and who should be in charge of decision-making. When conflict happens



– and it surely will – it is not to be ignored or squelched, for conflicts which grow out of expansion are indicators that the leaders and people do care about the future of the congregation, and they want to have significant participation in determining the character and future of the congregation and its ministries. The church has potential strength when there are people who take the church’s claims seriously. When leaders don’t care enough to confront important issues and other leaders the church will lose its capacity to adequately define its mission and expand its ministry.

### *Spirituality and the Expanding Disposition*

Spirituality remains primarily service to the community. The outward spiritual disciplines of service, worship, and celebration become the focus of the expanding disposition. Indeed, there is much to celebrate as the congregation continues to expand and grow. New members are added, new ministries are started, and ministry is experienced as successful. This might be time, however, to watch out for the activity trap, which happens when activities become the standard for success or the end, not a means to an end. Jesus’ words to Martha are provoking in different ways: “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:41-42). Our external tasks too easily become more valuable than the inward disciplines of prayer, solitude, reflection on scripture, and fasting.

Full calendars with every night on the calendar taken up for some kind of ministry may be a good time to step back and assess why the church is called into service in the first place. Busyness is not the same thing as ministry nor is it necessarily a sign that the church is fulfilling its mission in the community. It might be good to remember the words of Richard Foster who said, “In contemporary society our Adversary majors in three things: noise, hurry, and crowds. If he can keep us engaged in ‘muchness’ and ‘manyness,’ he will rest satisfied. Psychiatrist Carl Jung once remarked, ‘Hurry is not of the Devil; it is the Devil.’”<sup>25</sup> The Expanding disposition offers much to reflect upon. This is good; the disposition of deepening may be around the corner.

### *Risk and Innovation*

The original risk and innovation that characterized the launching disposition is replaced by the need to balance structure with an expanding ministry that at times can feel like it is “bursting at the seams.” In other words, it doesn’t feel too risky to be part of a congregation

---

<sup>25</sup> See Richard J. Foster. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth, Revised Edition*. NY: Harper & Row Publ., 1988, p. 15.

where everything is working. However, new risks may be ventured into new designs for structure or even at the first signs of conflict. Remember, up to this point, the expanding congregation has experienced unprecedented success. The first sign of conflict can feel overwhelming to leaders who are used to having everything they touch turn to gold. Growth pains are normal, some original founding members may even leave, and financial strains may also be felt for the first time. When this happens it is a good opportunity to expand the leadership of the church, to give away responsibility, as well as increase the number of people involved in ministry.

### *Mission*

The mission in an expanding disposition is often chaotic but energetic. There are always new initiatives to reach new populations. The problem that is often uncovered at this time can be subtle; the congregation must decide if it is merely getting bigger or if it is staying relevant to community needs. At this point, it is important for leaders to keep their eye on the big picture of the vision that is driving the energy for growth.

### *Gift-oriented Ministry*

In the expanding disposition members are still valued for their gifts for ministry more than they are for their financial contributions. This characteristic will reverse itself as the congregation moves into a time of deepening. What does begin to emerge during the expanding disposition is a split between clergy and laity as each compete for ministry both within the congregation and to the community as well. In addition, because so much new growth is occurring or because the leaders get lazy, volunteers are added to the ministry of the church without regard for their calling, passion, and giftedness. When this happens it will be important to look for new resources to aid growing ministries. Some things which the congregation can do are:

- Do another round of gift assessment, especially with the newer members;
- Hire outside consultants or services to help fill some of the gaps;

### *Discipleship*

A major shift in the expanding disposition from the launching disposition takes place; older models of discipleship training give way to newer models of discipleship making. Congregations in the expanding disposition need to guard against discipling existing members at the cost of reaching new disciples. As the congregation continues to grow almost effortlessly, more people ask for more programs as the congregation becomes a place where people expect to

have their spiritual needs met. Parish the thought as the church fails to deliver on this shallow promise of meeting everyone's needs. Rather, the continuously expanding church will continue to put its energies into adding "first generation" Christians who always are sure to keep the spiritual pot boiling as they bring their own set of special needs and desires.

### *DNA*

As the founding families grow in their commitment to the expanding church so also does their capacity to resist change. Feelings often get hurt as petty conflicts erupt over pet issues of various leadership groups. For example, one group may want to keep the worship a certain way while another group wants to change it in order to meet a new population group. At the same time this takes place, it is also not unreasonable to expect newer members to compete, with considerable energy, with the founding families over new ideas for ministry. When this starts to happen, it will be good for the leaders to shepherd the conflict by engaging all leaders in conflict management training. In addition, it is also good for the leaders to remember the role of resistance and embrace it as a friend. One strategy might be to have the original founding families tell the story of the "original" church and vision which still compels the best of commitments.

### *Expanding and Structure*

The structure is developing as the congregation grows, and the genius of the body metaphor used by St. Paul in his epistles to growing congregations is the organic nature of coordinating ministry according to the call of members and the variety of gifts and services of the body. If there is a "hierarchical" judgment of roles and how ministry is carried out, then those that seem to be "weaker" members of the body should be viewed as indispensable, be clothed with greater honor, and be treated with greater respect (I Cor 12).

The design of the organism necessary to carry out the mission of expanding congregations varies according to denomination and even local church. But each design communicates specific values in the structures themselves and in the belief systems of those who participate in the structures. For example, values and belief systems may include the explicit and implicit roles of leaders, lay and clergy, as well as the expectations of congregational members and constituents. If the expectations are such that members "pay the bills" so leaders can do "real" ministry and make important decisions about ministry, then the expanding disposition will have far reaching consequences in which the congregation may experience numerical growth but little depth of character, commitment, community, and service. On the other hand, the congregational membership may have a belief system that they pay leaders to do the work of the

ministry since they're already busy with their own careers, families, and personal lives. These are examples of DNA symptoms that, if not addressed, will have far reaching consequences that enable or impede growth.

As new opportunities translate into growing ministries, a change in structure is needed to design new programs, give focus, empower eager workers, and clarify their involvement – all of which are necessary in order to keep up with the expansion. When the structure changes, so must leaders' belief systems about the structure. For example, a pastor may have to let go of the belief that he or she must be involved in certain task forces or ministries of a growing church. An expanding congregation experiences ad-hoc, unpredictable changes in its organization design – perhaps becoming increasingly complex – as it wrestles with ways to increase its ministry effectiveness and respond to new opportunities.

Expansion without a change in the organization design may lead to chaos or bottlenecks, depending upon the capacity of the congregation to channel its expansion. Unclear structure may dissipate energy and mission, and a bureaucratic mindset of controlling leadership will stifle energy and mission. Therefore, each change in expansion must be accompanied by thinking through meaning and implications.

For example, there comes a time in expanding congregations in which informal communication as the sole means for coordination is not sufficient, for example, team members calling each other or meeting together to plan and implement a ministry. As ministries grow and as more leaders and volunteers are involved, the leadership begins to formalize expectations such as clarifying budget and planning expectations, determining accountability relationships (who reports to whom), and other matters of concern within the expanding structure. Almost always demands are made to create uniform policies and procedures, facilities are pushed to the limits, and financial responsibilities increase. These changes are meant to alleviate the pains of expansion through a focus on getting organized in order to reduce the confusion and chaos. The question remains: Will the organization design *serve* those involved in mission and ministry, or will it become the *power* of controlling leaders and the “powers” everyone else loves to hate?

### *Expanding and the Community*

By definition the expanding congregation reaches more deeply into the community through its outreach ministries, thus solidifying reputation and recognition. New ministries are constantly being launched as persons respond to their own sense of call and set out to employ their own gifts where they see ministry opportunities. Thus, leaders create an atmosphere, structure, and expectations for this volunteer energy and commitment to become a reality or

participation may sputter into minimum conformity. If appropriate leadership strategies are not articulated to the satisfaction of the congregation, the founding leadership nucleus tends to reinforce a fortress mentality that keeps the church closed to those on the outside. This is a major hurdle that all expanding congregations must navigate before highly energetic members who want to reach the outside world threaten to leave the church.

A congregation's ability to reach its community is a litmus test for congregations and their ability or inability to reach their neighborhoods. If a church is relevant to its context then the congregation will look like its context. In other words all the factors found in the congregation's context should be found in the congregation itself. Any gaps between contextual reality and the congregation's makeup are the areas in which the church can invest new energy for launching new ministries.

### *Vision*

In the expanding disposition, vision and organization fight for equal time and attention. This is expected since as the church grows and becomes larger more organization is needed in order to keep up with the complexity of the growth. As a result vision often becomes blurry and sometimes wanders far away from the original mandate that fueled the energy for the initial start. When this happens it is good to revisit the original vision and ask the following:

- Does this vision still make sense today?
- What do we want to keep hold of?
- What will we think of letting go or adding from the original vision?

### *Expanding and the Existing Congregation*

A common characteristic for congregations, who have been in existence for many decades, if not centuries, is for a huge gap to develop between the context and the congregation. For example, if a community has a contextual reality that reflects a large population of single moms, the congregational makeup should reflect this segment of the population as well. Many congregations who have been in existence for many years have also seen their neighborhoods in the immediate vicinity of the church undergo significant change. Unfortunately, many congregations have simply not kept up with the changing context. This inability of the congregation to maintain relevance to its context significantly damages the congregation's ability to reach the context the longer the gap exists between the contextual reality and the congregation's makeup.

In addition, the need to expand the leadership of the church is also critical for existing congregations. Too many congregations have not adapted to the needs of people to use their gifts for ministry and are still using out-dated modes of structuring themselves. These can vary from nominating committees to simply surveying the congregation to have its members list their talents. Neither of these can replace the fulfillment and satisfaction people gain when they are invited to use their gifts for ministry. Gift-oriented ministries are not the same thing as people using their talents or interests for ministry. In addition to gifts being grounded in scripture, there is also the necessary connection with grace or charisma, which are also at the heart of this type of ministry. If each member sees their own gifts as something which God has bestowed upon them for the good of the whole, then a whole new energy for doing ministry arises.

Changes which existing congregations might engage in include:

- conducting a gift survey of the congregation, interpreting the gift survey, and then inviting people to use their gifts for ministry
- changing the structure so that it is congruent with using people’s gifts instead of a nominating process
- engaging in a new outreach into the community
  - obtaining a new demographic profile of the community
  - participating in and creating new ministries that meet the needs of the community
- ensuring that new leaders are ascending to the top of leadership positions in the church
- adding small group ministries to ensure people have a chance to get better acquainted...and ensuring that leadership is spread around so each small group has at least one leader and one apprentice leader in order to ensure multiplication

What follows are summary characteristics, danger zones and leadership interventions to help a congregation negotiate its expanding disposition.

### **Expanding Characteristics**

	<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Danger Zone/Stuck Areas</i>	<i>Leadership Interventions</i>
Three Critical Components	Community Outreach	Church becomes exclusive club	Keep adding new leaders to growing ministry areas
Leadership	Leaders work tirelessly toward growth and inspiring others toward a vision that is becoming a possibility	Success syndrome: leaders start believing their own press releases about invincible growth and success	Expanding congregations require expanding leadership and greater efforts to keep members actively involved in the life and ministry of

			the congregation
Spirituality	Spirituality is played out in service	Expanding congregations are often prone to get caught up in the “Martha syndrome” where activities are valued more than spirituality and solitude	As the balance for spirituality shifts from inner life to outer service, remember to keep inner life discipleship making opportunities a priority
Risk and Innovation	Congregation is “bursting at the seams” while structure is trying to keep up with ministry	Growth pains: some original founders leave, facilities are strained, and financial responsibilities increase	Let go of control and responsibility to expanding leadership teams and providing greater volunteer ministry opportunities
Mission	Mission is engaging and focused to reach new populations Mood is chaotic but energetic	Mission is focused on getting bigger rather than staying relevant with community needs	Keep an eye on the big picture – don’t forget to fly the plane!
Gift-oriented Ministry	Members are valued for their gifts for ministry more than their financial contributions	Embracing old model of clergy/laity split for ministry – recruiting volunteers without consideration of the volunteer’s calling, passion, and giftedness	Look for new resources to aid growing ministries
Discipleship	Older models of discipleship training give way to discipleship making	No new disciples are made. Much emphasis on discipling existing adherents.	New, growing ministries will result in the need for discipleship making opportunities for those new people. Always keep adding “first generation” disciples to the church and eventually to the leadership.
DNA	Opportunity to emphasize DNA over pet issues of interest groups	Conflict may evolve between founding families and newer people who may have new ideas	Shepherd conflict by engaging all leaders in conflict management training. In addition, understand the role of resistance and embrace it as a “friend.” Have founding families keep telling the story of the “original” church and vision which compels the best of commitment.
Structure	Growth will impact structures that often evolve with a life of their own and may not make sense to the outsider	With the need for increasing layers of organization, increasing numbers of volunteer and/or paid “managers” are selected. There is a maxim worth stating here, “Managers don’t work, they manage the work. Only workers do the work.” With each new layer of management communications become more garbled, and entrepreneurship is diminished	Guard against increasing layers of management that tend to replace vitality and vision with increasing layers of bureaucracy. Remember structure is a means to effective mission; structure is not an end in itself
Community	Deeper connections to the community solidify community reputation	Begins to lose connection with community needs and concentrate more on internal matters within the congregation	Keep abreast of new ministry opportunities in the community for persons who are eager to volunteer their talents
Vision	Vision and organization fight for equal time and attention.	Vision becomes blurry as church continues to grow without regard to original vision	Revisit original vision. Does it still make sense today? What do we want to keep hold of? What will we think of letting go or adding from original vision?

## Chapter Four

### Dispositions of Congregations: Deepening

#### *Introduction*

Increasing complexity in the early church is well documented in the Epistles when looking at various congregations that were launched by Paul and other leaders. In just a few years after the launching of the church, concerns about leadership expectations, rules and appropriate behavior began to emerge. Paul's first epistle to Timothy not only established rules for leaders serving the church but also introduced ground rules for caring for widows, provision for families, appropriate dress, washing the saints' feet, and prayer (I & II Timothy, Titus). The specificity in the Pastoral Epistles seems far removed from the original chaos found in the launching of the first congregation in the Upper Room. This movement toward a concentration on internal characteristics such as organizational structure, management, and ritual are a part of the natural development of the early church.

At the same time, Paul was also concerned that young, growing churches experience a deepening center of their spiritual life in Christ. For the Ephesus church, he wrote his prayer for them in a letter:

“I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, [God] may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through the Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph 3:16-19).

It is safe to say that the disposition of Paul and early church leaders offer a final indication that the increase in behavioral rules and expectations *not* be done without intentional deepening of their spiritual lives.

#### *Definition of Deepening Disposition*

Deepening is the congregation looking inward to examine its depth of love, worship, spirituality, and commitment to each other in community— all of which are necessary to nurture the expanding growth. Deepening is to the congregation what soil, sun, and water is to make the plant grow and bear fruit. Establishing strong roots will ensure the health of a plant to withstand the severest storm and weather conditions. A friend showed us a twenty-foot high maple tree that



was struck by lightning a year ago; its trunk was slashed down the middle and toppled over about four feet from the ground. New branches were sprouting out all over from this damaged trunk, growing themselves to 5-6 feet in the last year. He then showed us a much younger fruit tree in his orchard whose leaves were discolored by disease. Both trees will survive because their root systems are well established.

The health and appearance of fast growing branches of large trees are misrepresented and short-lived when there is an inadequate root system, when the tree is not being deeply sustained by the soil. In fact, a healthy root system can withstand injury to the branches or even to the trunk of a tree.

### *Three Critical Components of Deepening*

The three critical components of the Deepening disposition are:

- The interplay between spirituality and structure;
- Over-emphasis on structure: “You’re perfectly designed to get the results you are getting;”
- Connect, connect, connect to the inner life of the spirit and community

### *Leadership and Deepening Disposition*

Deepening congregations need leaders who are not afraid to accompany others on a spiritual journey and to disturb the system. This is done by raising important, tough questions. The leaders must engage the congregation in measuring the gap between what is really happening in the congregation’s ministries as compared to what the congregation assumes is happening. The leaders and the congregation, together, must determine the next steps of engagement within the community, though the congregation’s current engagements may show the signs of unprecedented success. It is very easy for vision to become lost or trivialized during the deepening disposition, especially when increasing or changing the structure is done at the sacrifice of a deepening spirituality.

In sum, the newly established or “seasoned” congregation becomes vulnerable when increasing managerial and organizational structures replace the energizing chaos of the previous dispositions. Congregations become vulnerable when management and structure displaces the congregation’s earlier vision and its prior mission. This is easily done, almost without notice, because structure is needed to contain chaos and confusion. Leaders and members are caught up in the hustle and bustle of ministry – jam-packed calendars and buildings characterize persons in pursuit of tasks and deadlines. However, the vitality of vision and mission need not be totally lost

in the world of activities and good deeds. Nonetheless, the leaders of the congregation need to be aware! It could be that the only way to get the attention of a congregation for its need to choose deep change over stagnation or slow death. When embraced and navigated successfully, chaos will bring leadership to a new order. The other alternative is the conscious decision to prune.

### *Spirituality*

In the deepening disposition, leaders must pay attention to the corporate spiritual disciplines. Worship and the spirituality of meetings are two of the major corporate disciplines in which leaders can give direction. As the church moves into a disposition in which the community is ready to embrace the church as a force for prayer, support, and resiliency then worship needs to be done with the community in mind. No doubt, deepening congregations will put emphasis on multiple worship experiences as it attempts to reach more populations. Paying attention to the spirituality of meetings is an opportunity to capitalize on the many gifts and graces each person brings to every meeting in the church. Some ways to carry out spirituality in a meeting setting include:

- Be sure to pray for the participants and any special needs they may have;
- Start by reading a scripture that is pertinent to the topic of the meeting;
- Practice the spiritual discipline of group discernment.

A caution that a deepening disposition offers to the leaders is the lack of balance between the outward spiritual journey and the inward journey. This is addressed by encouraging all members of the congregation to participate in small covenant communities that are based on the spiritual disciplines of prayer, scripture reading, serious spiritual conversation, and acts of mercy.

### *Risk and Innovation*

In the deepening disposition almost anything can be seen as a risk, especially if it involves the building, the time for worship, educational services for children and youth, and other sacred cows. Because of years of success, leadership is lulled into thinking that everything is okay. Stability and success feel comfortable. A focus on *preserving* what we have replaces risk and adventure. Definitions of effectiveness are based upon compliance to rules and procedures. Problems inside the organization begin to suck up the energy needed for reaching out. The “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” mentality begins to dominate leadership decisions. When this happens leaders need to disturb the system to address the complacency within the church. As John Kotter

correctly points out, “With complacency high, transformations usually go nowhere because few people are even interested in working on the change problem.”<sup>26</sup>

### *Mission*

The mission of the deepening congregation is to take existing ministries and make them stronger or to deepen them by growing spiritually in our understanding of the congregation’s mission. However, it is also at this time that mission statements begin showing up on the walls of the church replacing the original “live out” vision. When leaders see this happen, they will want to pay attention to assess ministry activities in light of mission questions:

- How does each ministry and activity advance mission?
- Are there new opportunities in the community that should connect to our mission?
- Are we challenging people in their calling, giftedness and passion to respond to community needs?
- What needs compel our members to act?
- What new ministries are waiting to be launched in the spiritual soil of new life and possibilities?
- Are there ministries that should be altered, strengthened or given a decent burial?

### *Gift-oriented Ministry*

Members become recognized for their contributions to existing ministries rather than for starting new ministries. People are valued more for what they give financially to the church than for their gifts for ministry. Leaders need to start a regular practice of offering gift assessment surveys to new members first, then to the entire congregation, depending on how long it has been since the last assessment.

### *Discipleship*

A dramatic shift takes place in the deepening disposition from the previous two dispositions of launching and expanding; the entire disciple making emphasis transfers from discipling new members to discipling existing members. When this happens there is often an accompanying absence of first generation Christians as no new disciples are made. At this point leaders need to reconnect with the community either through community “walk arounds,” a

---

<sup>26</sup> See John P. Kotter, *Leading Change*. Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Press, 1996. p 36.

demographic study or both. Once the needs of the community are assessed then new ministries can be addressed to meet them.

### *DNA*

If a deepening congregation is three to four generations away from the original founding families, then it becomes important to keep the “ghosts of the past” alive through story-telling, written documentation, or other devices. Sometimes, the original DNA, ie. the characteristics that are passed down from one generation to the next, act as blocking forces; sometimes they can free up new risk taking courage as the congregation decides to undertake a new vision process.

### *Deepening and Structure*

The propensity in churches is to add structure to facilitate growth without paying attention to the “deepening” root system. It is impossible for congregations to grow in size without increasing in complexity. How are ministries specialized and harmonized within members of the congregation? Should we hire vocational clergy to help with growing ministries, or should we recruit and hire people from the congregation that demonstrate a successful track record? Are there ministries pastors should hand over to the lay leadership in the congregation? Are ministry opportunities defined primarily “inside” the church or are people encouraged to participate in ministry “outside” the church? How should the pastoral staff prioritize its time? What should be the job descriptions and salary packages for administrative staff positions? What is the most effective and equitable process to plan and budget ministries? What must be done about the pressing needs of over-crowded facilities? When is the best time to update computer, multi-media, and sound systems?

Peter Drucker advocates that any organization must change its structure when it increases or decreases its size by 20%. It is safe to say that the organizational design that enabled any congregation to arrive at a current level of success will not be the design that will serve them well in the future. This is why organizational design must be seen primarily through two lenses: *organization structure* and *belief systems* of individuals about leadership, the role of laity, and the structure itself. For example, if a congregation believes that the only way to provide leadership for growing ministries is to hire a recent seminary graduate or seasoned minister, this will be a statement to the congregation about its lay leadership role in expanding ministries. On the other hand, if leaders recruit only from within a congregation, it may miss outstanding leaders who could bring a fresh and inspired perspective. Each decision is a balance between belief systems

and the needs that are hopefully addressed by a change in the leadership structure, but not without negative implications.

Emphasizing structure in expanding congregations is necessary for everything to run more effectively and more smoothly. The vision that propelled the launching and expanding congregation continues to be vital; however, for the vision to become a reality, it also must include the management necessity for effective planning, budgeting, and paying attention to the day-to-day operations – but not without deepening its roots of spiritual nurture and sustenance. Jesus used this metaphor when sharing with his disciples when he said, “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15: 5).

Legitimate concerns of structure and complexity in growing congregations must never be a substitute for mission, must not drain energy needed for ministry, or must not turn down the invitation to grow more deeply in spiritual vitality and covenant community. There must be a balance between the inner and outer spiritual disciplines. Over emphasis of one over the other will result in either a church that prays but has little engagement with its community or a church that is very socially active but does not spend time in discerning the times.

### *Deepening and the Community*

A deepening disposition that accompanies a congregation in finding new ways to structure growth and new ministries will ensure its health and vitality, its future and effectiveness. Hiring new people, opening new positions, getting more visibility in the community hardly seems like a desperate need for deepening. Therefore, the deepening disposition must be a conscious choice, and it is perhaps the most complex of dispositions. On the surface, things could not be better. All indicators point to leaders doing something right. The congregation is often center stage as a gathering place for the entire community, including the increasing visibility of the pastor. Leaders assume multi-faceted roles and responsibilities while taking fewer risks as they maintain the clarity of guiding principles and values that have effectively brought the congregation thus far.

However, success can soon turn into the reality of status quo. Those who question or seem dissatisfied with the status quo are seen as disloyal or troublemakers – and a real pain. Preserving what has already been achieved competes with the risk of trying new ventures. Now there is more to lose. Paradoxically, congregations that are growing in their structure without deepening are vulnerable because yesterday’s successes may very well impede future growth and maturity. There is an axiom that states, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” However, this is not the

time for the church to rest on its laurels; it needs to listen for direction and trim its sails for the future. In spite of its successes, there is a challenge calling for freshness and increased relevance for faith in God within the community. The great test confronting the deepening congregation is that of knowing how to celebrate its accomplishments while maintaining its earlier spiritual hunger and zest for ministry and growth.

### *Deepening and the Existing Congregation*

It may be true that a majority of congregations across the American landscape have spent a disproportionate amount of time in the Deepening disposition. They have had a long history of being in the center of the community, often as big buildings in the middle of what once was a growing and bustling downtown. Unfortunately, for many of these once thriving congregations, the times have come and gone. They are left with a dwindling membership, buildings that are in disrepair, and financial strains on every side. To make matters worse, long-term members have vivid memories of the good old days; times when the church was full, memories of raising their children, or having buried mom and dad there. Now their kids have long ago left the community and the church just isn't the same place it used to be. These people are sad, depressed, and sometimes angry. To make matters worse, they can't figure out what happened. How did our church change so fast? Why didn't we see it coming? Is there any hope for us? These are often the questions one hears in these old, downtown, "first" churches.

But this is not the story of every congregation that is old with a long history. Many congregations have made the shift to a new day by reinventing themselves into something completely new. They saw their communities change and did something about it while maintaining their identity. They reached out, discerned the times, and made new ministry inroads to new populations. If one were to go back to these congregations and visit them ten to twenty years ago and compare them to what is happening today they would not be recognizable. When times get tougher either because of greater financial instability or declining membership, go deeper. That is, pray, discern the times and remember that the church is ultimately God's. What is it that distinguishes one congregation that made the shift to a new day from one that doesn't? Many factors. Key among them are the following:

- Reinvent the church in order to better reflect the changing community:
- Incremental steps will not suffice, major reinventions are needed...this is hard on the existing members but it must be done:
- Encourage long-term members who have difficulty with the changes that are necessary to find new church homes:

- This is a great time to do a year’s worth of spiritual retreats where the goal is to discern the future of the church:
- If the structure is not functional, ie., does not facilitate ministry, then by all means change it by becoming more decentralized, less complex, and include newer leaders:
- Encourage leaders to start changing from within first.

What follows are summary characteristics, danger zones, and leadership interventions to help the congregation negotiate its deepening disposition.

### Deepening Characteristics

	<i>Characteristics of the Deepening Disposition</i>	<i>Danger Zone/ Stuck Areas</i>	<i>Leadership Interventions</i>
Three Critical Components	Interplay of spirituality and structure	Over-emphasis on structure: “You’re perfectly designed to get the results you are getting”	Connect, connect, connect to interior life of the Spirit and to the community
Leadership	Capable leaders bring stability and are often visible within the denomination and community	“Safety at all costs” begins to dominate leadership thinking	Take time for solitude and other spiritual disciplines in order to discern new and renewed engagement in the community
Spirituality	Intentional spirituality balances emphasis on organizational design	Neglect of interior, spiritual, and communal life	Encourage all members to participate in small (8 – 12 people) covenant communities that are based upon the spiritual disciplines of prayer, scripture, serious spiritual conversation, and acts of mercy
Risk and Innovation	Almost anything can be seen as a risk, especially if it involves the building, the time for worship, educational services for children and youth, and other sacred cows	Because of years of success, leadership is lulled into thinking that everything is okay. Stability and success feel comfortable. A focus on <i>preserving</i> what we have replaces risk and adventure. Definitions of effectiveness are based upon compliance to rules and procedures. Problems inside the organization begin to suck up the energy needed for reaching out “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” mentality begins to dominate leadership decisions	Disturb the system to address complacency
Mission	Mission of the church is to deepen the existing ministries and make them stronger and more healthy	Mission statements begin showing up on church walls replacing the original “lived out” vision	Pay attention to assess ministry activities in light of mission questions: How does each ministry and activity advance mission? Are there new opportunities in the community that should connect to our mission? Are we challenging people in their calling, giftedness and passion to respond to community needs? What needs are compelling to our members? What new ministries are waiting to be

			launched in the spiritual soil of new life and possibilities? Are there ministries that should be altered, strengthened or given a decent burial?
Gift-oriented Ministry	Gifts become recognized more for their contribution to existing ministries rather than for starting new ministries	People are valued more for what they give financially to the church than for their gifts for ministry	Starting with new members, establish a practice of introducing gift assessment surveys
Discipleship	Focus completely shifts to discipling existing members	No new disciples are made and there is an absence of “first generation” Christians.	Renewed connection with community needs by engaging in demographic studies to determine needs that can be addressed through new programming
DNA	Keep original DNA of vision and risk taking alive	The “ghosts” of the founding families remains as blocking forces for change	Keep telling the stories of the days when the church was founded. Keep whatever connections still exist with founding families
Structure	Things are progressing smoothly but some dissatisfaction arises among new members who are trying to “break in” to the existing structure	Caught in the activity trap where success is measured by the number of activities as an end in and of themselves versus a means to a larger purpose	Don’t let the control of resources rule over passion, vision, and mission
Community	Established relationships with the community	Church loses its connection with community and community begins to feel like the church doesn’t care	Launch new ministries that reflect meeting tangible needs in the community
Vision	Confusion about the difference between vision and mission	Little or no vision that brings vitality to the congregation	Start engaging in a visioning process



## Chapter Five

### Dispositions of Congregations: Pruning

#### *Introduction*

It didn't take long for the early church to face its first crisis. Acts 15 chronicles an emerging debate that focused on requirements for new converts: Would they be required to live by existing synagogue standards or a new set of emerging church standards that would be more inclusive? The early church leaders faced the challenge of letting go of an original set of standards in order to "not make it difficult" for new converts to be embraced into the faith. The early church leaders' capacity to "prune" the older paradigm enabled the church to keep its frontier spirit energetic and vital. This did not happen without consternation and pain; nor did it happen without leaders making a case for the tough decision to shed old traditions. But future survival depended upon the courage of the leaders to take a stand. Now looking back we know the greater risk of future growth would have been to remain a Jewish sect and not to reach out to Gentiles.

There is a saying by Jesus according to John's gospel: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit" (15:1-2). To the congregation that "needs" every twig and branch it can claim its own, this metaphor makes little sense. How can we afford to get rid of even one branch when every branch, however brittle, seems necessary for our existence? Pruning on a dying plant is different than pruning a growing plant. If a plant is already in its advanced stages of dying, one can never be certain it will live beyond pruning, though it is certain to die without it.

#### *Definition of the Pruning Disposition*

Pruning is the discipline of cutting branches away from a plant to encourage future growth. It is removing whatever is unnecessary or unwanted. If done correctly and in the right time, it will not hurt the plant, and the results are often surprising. If done improperly or too late, pruning can damage or even kill a plant. More often than not, however, the plant looks better and is more fruitful if done correctly.

For this reason, if the entire congregation reaches the pruning disposition with few signs, if any, of other dispositions, then the discipline of pruning is overdue. If pruning were done earlier, providing the deepening, nurturing ingredients are active, there should be new growth

already happening or the dying ministries would have been replaced by launching new ones. The pruning disposition creates a time for the leaders and members of the congregation to take stock of the congregation's programs and ministries, with an eye toward retiring old programs and ministries that are inhibiting new growth, in order to free up resources and energies for more fruitful vitality and new or revitalized ministries.

### *Three Critical Components of the Pruning Disposition*

- Discern present reality and cultivate new growth;
- Failure of nerve to move out of comfort zones;
- Either do a great funeral for the church or insist that the church move toward a renewed interest in the community.

### *Pruning and Leadership*

The pruning disposition is often ignored or opposed by the leaders and members of the congregation. There is a saying that says, "Old habits die hard." And so it is within congregations. However, there is a story in the Gospels that accentuates the necessity of pruning away old, stagnant ministry programs that have lived their day – in order to make room for new vitality and growth in the ministries of the congregation of today. This account is found in Luke 13:6 – 9.

"A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put fertilizer on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

The story of the aging and barren fig tree is an apt description of the intent and process of the pruning disposition in a local church. Unfortunately, many congregations never initiate a pruning disposition within the congregation because they think, "The old is good enough." They are blinded to an awareness that the tree is filled with mostly dead branches that demand their attention. Sadly, many congregations are experiencing this reality today.

The leadership of pruning congregations feels schizophrenic living in different realities. On the one hand, there is the need to care for and be sensitive to the established members who have faithfully invested their time, resources, and gifts in the congregation. It is not prudent or fair to take away what has been most precious to them. If this is the only role, however, it will mean a "settling in" leadership role that will chaplain the church through to its inevitable funeral. On the other hand, is the need to launch a new congregation that is more

responsive to the community needs. These two leadership roles – caring for established members and launching new ministries -- in predominantly pruning congregations feel like an emotional tightrope that compete for energy. Such leadership takes enormous stamina, depth of character, clarity of vision, and persistence.

Leaders are needed in pruning congregations who can lead the congregation on a quest that takes the best of the past and build new futures. These leaders can do this by asking appropriate appreciative questions. This strategy will go a long way toward moving the church forward to its new God-discerned future. If the congregation is not willing to do this, either because it no longer has the energy or because it no longer wants to invest in its community, every effort should be made to offer ministry to that congregation that can lead them quickly to a dignified funeral.

### *Spirituality*

In a pruning congregation there is a lack of sharing one's faith not only among the members of the congregation but more importantly with the community. Friendships and relationships increase but the congregation becomes a close-knit community where all of one's friends are in the church. When this happens the church often takes on the characteristics of what some call a "60-40-20" church. That is, the membership is mostly comprised of people who are sixty years of age or older, they have been a Christian for forty years or more, and have been a member of one particular church for twenty years or more. While these members may enjoy each others company, especially at one another's funeral, they are close to extinction.

Rarely will there be a "new converts" class in a pruning congregation. The church exists primarily for the sake of the members who have hunkered down for the last remaining years of their life. Leaders of pruning congregations (all too often it is only the pastor) must become adamant about reaching out to the community even if it means reinventing the church.

### *Risk and Innovation: The Painful Reality of the Pruning Disposition*

The pruning disposition finds churches cutting back, scaling down, and dealing with depleting resources. Many scramble for new energy, feeling it was a long time ago when the place was "full," people start telling stories of the "good ole days." There remains the structure of branches, some very large and massive, but very brittle; there are few, if any, signs of new life. This is a sad and often depressing time when people remember how big and beautiful everything once was – it seems only natural to rehearse the stories of earlier commitments in order to survive the harder storms. It is no wonder we are prone to idealize the past. Memories are vivid and

strong. But the reality of the present is necessarily more clearly in focus for those who see needed change for a compelling future. The pressures of pruning once beautiful branches often wear down long time leaders of such congregations.

### *Mission*

Seeking reliance on denominational support becomes increasingly important as resources steadily decline. Older members continue to deny the reality as suggestions for turning the church around are squelched.

### *Gift-oriented Ministry*

In pruning congregations, members are valued more for what they can contribute financially, than for their gifts for ministry. Furthermore, in-fighting increases as members blame one another and seek to displace responsibility. If a pastor happens to be unfortunate enough to serve a pruning congregation, it is important to immediately introduce new members to a gift assessment process. If the church is open to one new ministry approach, it could reinvent itself by launching a gift-oriented style of doing ministry and dispose of any nominating processes.

### *Discipleship*

All energies go toward providing training to a few stalwarts. It's been a long time since anyone can remember making a new disciple for Christ. Treat new visitors carefully. Don't scare them away but respond to them if they show interest. Gradually integrate them into leadership of the church.

### *DNA*

The founding members have long gone and with them the good ole days when the church was vibrant and energetic. However, and every pastor of a pruning congregation knows full well, the influence of the founding families is still felt even though they may have been dead for many years. We believe the founding members never "die." Their influence can be heard in meetings when new ideas are courageously brought to the table by such works like:

- We can't do that it will upset so and so.
- We never did it like that before;
- We can't do that, we don't have enough...people, money, young people, etc.

When these statements become the norm it may be too late. Unless people are willing to talk with renewed vigor about the days when the church was founded, what was going on then, and

what the community was like at the time of the founding, then the church is breathing it's last breath. At that point it would be better to offer a dignified funeral than to make new inroads into the community.

### *Structure*

Business meetings as well as workers become highly anxious as the hard realities set in; new leaders find it almost impossible to penetrate the existing structure making it difficult for them to realize their full potential. A routinization of ministry activities become the norm. If there is to be any hope at all for the pruning congregation it will be found in new teams who commit themselves to re-launching efforts.

### *Community*

When the community serves the church instead of the church serving the community, then you will see a congregation offering dinners, pig roasts, and all sorts of money-raising techniques in order to keep the finances solvent. Often these activities are done in the name of reaching the community but in fact they are desperate measures to keep the doors open. Furthermore, members of pruning congregations are impervious to the changes happening in society and are thus out of touch with the community and cultural realities. Of course, the key to the survival of a pruning congregation is a renewed outreach to the community. However, we believe that while the congregation may have good intentions in its desires it may be too little too late. Even when new people show up too often there is little to offer them because energy is low, programs are outdated, and people are simply unfriendly to outsiders.

### *Vision*

In the pruning congregation there is no vision. The members become stuck in a time warp of a well remembered successful past, but they cannot envision a brighter future. A new vision must be launched, one that has the community and its needs as the target.

### *Pruning and the Existing Congregation*

The opportunities available to pruning congregations come when taking risks to re-launch ministries with renewed energy, vision, and mission commitment. However, many pruning congregations find it hard to find any energy for new ministry directions. Pruning congregations often attempt desperate measures to reach out to new populations only to find that their efforts are too late. Once a community begins to view the congregation as ingrown, out of touch with

community realities, and doing little or nothing to serve the community, it is almost impossible to change community opinion of the congregation.

The ‘wolf’ that is howling at the door may be staved off for a while. Some progress can be made by aggressive campaigns to make the aging church visible to the community, but usually this is not enough to attract and hold new attenders. Finally, as older members begin dying there are no new people to take their places. The story of the barren fig tree is an object lesson into the necessity of pruning the aging or ineffective programs as a matter of course, and not as a stop-gap measure.

Here are some strategies for pruning congregations:

- Stop doing things that have lost their effectiveness. One way to judge this is to ask whether or not anyone new has joined this ministry in the last two years;
- Reach out to the community:
  - Do a demographic profile of the community
  - Engage the church in ministries that are designed to reach new populations
- Begin a vigorous campaign to launch new ministries.
- If the church fails to attract new members, consider closing the church. Sell the church building and use the proceeds of the sale to help launch new ministries or aid established ministries that are effective in reaching their surrounding community.

### Characteristics of Pruning Congregations

	<i>Characteristics of Pruning Congregations</i>	<i>Danger Zone/ Stuck Areas</i>	<i>Leadership Interventions</i>
Three Critical Components	Discern present reality and cultivate new growth	Failure of nerve to move out of comfort zones	Either do a great funeral for the church or insist on moving the church toward a renewed interest in the community
Leadership	People are working harder and enjoying it less	Leader becomes chaplain leading the church to a dignified funeral	Become stubbornly unyielding to anything but reaching out to the community. Help the congregation face realities and develop a plan for transition Offer celebration and dignified burials
Spirituality	Friendships and relationships increase but sharing one’s faith with others decreases	Rarely is there a “new converts” class as church serves the needs of a dwindling few	Must become adamant about reaching out to the community even if it means reinventing the church
Risk and Innovation	The congregation becomes more bureaucratic in nature and is riddled with petty conflicts and blaming. Loyal critics express the necessity of cutting back on programs and ministries; others simply stop attending and go looking for a more vital congregation	Members report being tired and lacking energy to do new things. Fear seeks security at all costs. Members are aware that something needs to change but don’t see their own need to make changes	Hold hands of older members by reassuring them that their priorities will not be disregarded but that new priorities will be added in order to reach the community

Mission	As resources dwindle, the mission becomes seeking increasing reliance on denominational support	Older members deny reality. Suggestions made by persons who are not "party line" are squelched	Must see mission as part and parcel of the community outside the walls of church
Gift-oriented Ministry	People become valued for what they can financially contribute rather than their gifts for ministry	In-fighting increases as members blame one another and seek to displace responsibility	Immediately introduce new members to gift-assessment process. If church is open, it could reinvent itself by launching a gift-oriented style of ministry and dispose of nominating processes
Discipleship	All energies go toward providing training to a few stalwarts	It's been a long time since anyone can remember making a new disciple for Christ. The existing membership is 60 years of age or older, has been a Christian for 40 years or more, and has been a member of that church for 20 years or more	Treat new visitors carefully. Don't scare them away. Respond to them if they show interest. Gradually integrate them into the leadership of the church
DNA	Gone are founding families and the "good ole days" of when the church was vibrant and healthy.	Founding families may be dead but their influence is still felt as resistance to change	Talk about the days when the church was founded. What was going on then? What was the community like? How has the community changed since?
Structure	Business meetings and workers become highly anxious as the hard realities set in, and new leaders find it difficult to realize their full leadership potential	Routinization of ministry activities become the norm	Develop new teams who will commit themselves to re-launching efforts
Community	Community serves the church	Members are impervious to the changes happening in society and thus are out of touch with community and national realities	Make renewed commitments to the community by reinventing church. Reinvest in the community by identifying what needs are crying out for your attention and best efforts
Vision	Gone	The members become stuck in a time warp of a well remembered successful past, but they cannot envision a brighter future	A new vision must be launched, one that has the community and its needs as the target

## Chapter Six

### Assumptions Supporting The Resiliency Of Congregations

In all of our reading we have not found literature that documents the resiliency of the congregation. While there is much talk, especially in this first part of our new century, of the resiliency of individuals, schools, and communities, there is no such application for the church. We think the time is right for new ground to be broken that documents that congregations also possess great resiliency, and when they do, whole communities benefit.

Therefore, we thought it might be beneficial to the reader to understand the underlying assumptions we started with when we began to write about congregational resiliency. In addition, the following assumptions serve as theoretical hinge points upon which to hang deeper meanings as the reader becomes engaged in the process of discerning the resiliency of the congregation.

#### For Local Congregations

##### 1. *Congregations are “complex adaptive systems.”<sup>27</sup>*

As such congregations are nonlinear systems that possess the capacity to be adaptive. In a complex adaptive system change is constant. Unlike the steady state of a pendulum that swings back and forth, a congregation never dissipates its energy to change. Congregations are never fixed or set. They are always in motion.

This seems especially clear from the description of the church in the New Testament. The early church goes through a metamorphic process from being a small intimate community gathering in homes to a more institutionalized organization that sets up rules from how to care for widows to requirements for being a leader. Clearly, the church evolved, changed, adapted to the needs of new converts, especially gentiles.

On the positive side, congregations possess great capacities for creativity and adaptability for change. On the negative side, congregations that are not adaptive, or who do not possess the insights necessary to adapt to new changes in their larger world, will eventually atrophy and die. Something happens to the church to disturb it. New members join, clergy leaders



come and go, the community changes, this new information is taken into the church, fed back through the congregation and a new state of dynamic equilibrium is reached but the congregation is also ready for new information.

The congregation will go through several experiences, perhaps with many happening at one time, that will require them to discern the new information, adapt, reach a new state of equilibrium and then go through the same process again. It is the ability of the congregation to be adaptive, to change, to be able to spring back during any kind of adversity that makes it resilient.

### *2. Some of the most disruptive experiences take congregations by surprise.*

A congregation will experience many unforeseen changes that dramatically affect its equilibrium. Some of such unforeseen events include the following: pastoral transitions, denial, congregational conflict, natural disasters, sexual trauma, changing neighborhoods, and the passing of time. These variables are often outside the control of the congregation but nevertheless have a profound effect on the congregation. Sometimes a natural disaster, such as a hurricane or tornado, provides enough motivation to propel the congregation into a launching disposition that renews vision, vitality and ministries never before imagined.

We know of a congregation whose pastor was involved in an extra-marital affair with one of the congregants. When this news finally hit the congregation, they took it hard. They blamed themselves, became angry and bitter, and started to fight among themselves. They behaved in these disturbing patterns for over twenty years. Finally, they decided to close; they were too tired and sick of beating each other up. The process of closure became a catalyst, however, for them to turn inward and discover the importance members played in one another's lives. They soon found themselves able to forgive themselves and the former pastor. Their bitterness left as quickly as their initial shock hit them twenty years earlier.

### *3. Dispositions are nonlinear movements that are subject to the limitations of time.*

Chronological age does not predispose a congregation toward one disposition or another. Newly launched congregations may quickly require a disposition of pruning, as the church adjusts to a new building or relocation of its worship space. A deepening congregation that has been in existence for more than 150 years will launch many new ministries throughout its history. Nor is there a prescribed amount of time that a congregation should experience in

---

<sup>27</sup> T. Irene Sanders. *Strategic Thinking and the New Science: Planning in the Midst of Chaos, Complexity, and Change*. NY: The Free Press, 1998, p. 68-69.

each disposition. A congregation will experience both long and short stretches of time of launching new ministries or pruning older existing program efforts.

The more years spent in one disposition will increase the probability of that disposition becoming a danger for that particular congregation. For example, if a congregation has not been pruning for a long period of time, with little or no experience in the other dispositions within that time period, there is a strong correlation between time spent in the disposition and being stuck.

The authors have personally observed several newly launched congregations moving quickly through each disposition even though they are primarily still in a disposition of launching. In one particular case, a launching church experienced a rapid increase of members in its first two years of existence. The pastor quickly moved toward organizing the church into a complex web of committees and task forces.

However, when organizational structure took the place of leadership development, it became a tactical error that nearly killed the new effort. Before long the church began losing energy, members started leaving, and the pastor became emotionally and physically exhausted. In an effort to regroup, a handful of leaders revisited the original vision and discovered that they had become sidetracked with structure instead of harnessing the energy for reaching new converts. They discovered that their decision to organize, at the expense of mission and vision, caused them to function as a deepening church that had too much concern for structure and policy.

Thus the original energy and excitement was “bottle-necked” and lost for a time. They decided to quickly “prune” the structure, to look for a new worship space to rent, and to utilize a worship format that was better suited to the needs of the people they were reaching. The church was barely three years old and had already experienced many of the characteristics of each disposition. Today, the church is thriving and recently purchased its first building. The early decisions to prune may have saved the congregation’s life.

On the other hand, prolonged exposure to a particular disposition often stifles an awareness of the value of the other dispositions. A congregation that spends too much time in pruning, for example, is negatively impacted, as people begin to wonder if there will ever be new signs of life and growth.

4. *Congregations will experience all dispositions, whether intentionally or not.*

A congregation’s disposition is not a linear, static process. Because there is benefit in all of the dispositions, congregations may choose to embrace a particular disposition in order to

be more effective in its mission and faithful to its vision. The only exception to this is a launching congregation that decides to “pull the plug” on the effort before it reaches an expanding or deepening disposition.

*5. Dispositions contribute to the congregation’s resiliency and ministry effectiveness.*

All the dispositions offer potential health to a congregation. To remain resilient congregations are motivated to launch new ministries, to expand, to deepen, and to prune. A particular ministry may embrace a particular disposition while other ministries and the congregation itself may experience other dispositions.

For example, imagine a congregation decides to launch small group ministries. If small groups expand rapidly, structure is needed to establish expectations for participating in small groups and to develop leaders. It is also true that a small group ministry must be expanded and deepened before launching other new ministries in order to nourish the life that is already developing. To launch new ministries at the expense of deepening small groups may contribute to all ministries suffering. Eventually, if certain small groups become stale and lifeless, they may need to be pruned so that the energy stifled by a sense of obligation can move elsewhere in ministry. Pruning – a sensitive issue that requires judgment, discernment, and wise timing – is a necessary intervention that is as real to the health and survival of a congregation as pruning is to plants.

*6. Congregations that remain too long in any disposition will put themselves in danger of being stuck.*

A congregation that stays too long in a particular disposition is in danger of suffering the effect of “dispositional stuckness” (danger zone). Each disposition produces an experience that is conducive for producing fruit relative to that disposition. For example, one fruit of launching is vision, while one fruit of expanding is new converts. However, if new converts are not assisted to deepen their faith journey because the church has not moved into the deepening disposition, they lose the opportunity to become more committed disciples (in reality this is what accounts for many of the reasons that people leave the church as they look elsewhere for a church to provide resources for deepening their life in Christ). Churches who do not prune older methods of evangelism are not geared up to teach persons how to share their faith in a post-modern context.

7. *Robust launching dispositions keep congregations fresh and vital.*

The components of the launching disposition – vision, mission energy, etc. – are vital for all existing congregations. Therefore, all congregations, especially those in the deepening or pruning dispositions, would do well to intentionally initiate a disposition of launching. Exposure to the launching disposition by a deepening congregation will provide new vision, renewed commitment to contextual ministry, and provide new converts. If congregations are stuck in their inability to prune, then launching becomes more difficult, though still possible.

The authors know of many congregations that have launched new ministries throughout their lives and, as a result, experienced renewed vision, missional outreach, and numerical growth. For example, congregations across the denominational landscape are launching new worship experiences in an effort to be vital in their ministry efforts. At times the newly launched worship experiences become larger worshipping communities than the older existing worship services. The energy and vitality of these communities, though questioned and resisted by some members, infuse the whole congregation with new life and spirit.

8. *Prolonged exposure to the pruning disposition may make launching new ministries difficult if not impossible.*

The authors maintain that launching new ministries of any kind in congregations that have experienced prolonged dispositions of pruning is difficult at best. The capacity to experience dispositions of renewal may not materialize in pruning congregations that have pruned all but a handful of existing members. Prolonged pruning, when there are no signs of new growth, can result in serious damage to the congregation. It is a hard reality to accept, but some congregations may prune by distributing the assets of their congregation to other congregations, merge with other congregations, or reinvent themselves through launching as a new presence in the community.

The authors see opportunity in pruning the entire congregation, for there is reason to celebrate. First, the congregation has offered years of ministry to the community and has ministered to many people despite its present state of affairs. Second, pruning does not strip the congregation of all its assets. Some congregations can decide to help another congregation launch new ministries. Third, pruning is God's way of creating healthier living systems. From a denominational perspective, pruning one congregation so another can thrive is an act of health and faith. Trying to create life where there is no life is an act of futility. In every denomination there are congregations who are no longer able to experience a disposition of launching in their particular geographical setting. Fourth, pruning

congregations afford great opportunities for pastors who have the skill and expertise to serve congregations that are in a pruning disposition to close. To date, these skills are under-valued even though they may be in great supply.

We know of a congregation that very recently decided intentionally to close. For years the church struggled to make financial ends meet as the community changed. Finally, at the advice of some courageous judicatory leaders, the congregation made a decision to sell its building to another congregation who more adequately fit the profile of the changing community. The “new” congregation bought the church for one dollar, sold its existing church and used the proceeds from that sale to do the necessary repairs to their newly purchased church. Today when the former members drive by the church they see the parking lot full of cars and a church that looks re-newed and well-used.

9. *The influence of one disposition will impact the entire congregation.*

Some congregations exhibit a predominant disposition that affects the entire congregational system. For example, a church deep into the launching disposition is permeated with excitement about the new birth, is chaotic at every level and is intentional in its ministry to reach the community. A sense of excitement on the part of one ministry program affects all of the programs within the congregation.

In fact, so strong is dispositional impact that casual visitors pick up on the dispositional spirit when they enter the church for the first time. In other words, the experience of a particular disposition produces a climate that affects the spirit of a congregation. For example, a visitor attending a new church start picks up the sense of energy that is compelling the new church start. People are excited about being there. New things are being tried. Visitors receive attention. This experience is much different than visiting a pruning church, where a visitor may or may not receive a greeting or feel welcomed.

Similarly, visitors will feel energized in an expanding church that is experiencing new growth and vitality. New attendees are eagerly invited into some small group ministry and may even be asked if they are interested in a personal gift assessment. A deepening church, on the other hand, tends to send out signals that you are *lucky* to attend there. The focus is how you fit into the existing structure. The focus may not be upon making the new visitor feel welcomed and valued. Unfortunately, the atmosphere of a pruning church may feel the most depressed. The people look tired and worn out. They may even overwhelm visitors because they are so happy to see a new face in the congregation.

10. *Multiple dispositions can be experienced simultaneously.*

The dispositions of a congregation's journey are fluid and often overlap with one another. For example, some pruning may need to take place to allow something new to be launched. It is also important to remember that launching new ministries may be premature if existing ministries need expanding and deepening. Fruitful, new ministries will expand the need for leadership development. A deepening congregation can experience both the pruning disposition and a launching disposition simultaneously as old ministries die and new ministries are launched. Similarly, a congregation just getting launched may need to prune its original vision as the core adherents become clearer about their identity. It is our experience that congregations, in order to remain vital and connected to contextual mission, will participate in at least more than one disposition at a time.

For example, consider the story of a typical downtown First Church. Many of these churches have been in existence for over 150 years and have experienced many dispositions throughout their long existence. The more recent history of these churches has been a mix of unparalleled growth in the 50's and 60's, followed by a long plateau disposition that started in the 70's and extended into the 90's. By the turn of the century, many of these churches were ready to address the reality that something serious had to be done in order to ensure future effectiveness. The calendars of these churches are jam-packed and include meetings every evening of the week. Leaders of these churches are long-term members who rotate positions thus making it difficult for newer, younger members to move into those positions. For many of these churches the story is the same. They are tired, numerically declining, and not able to launch successful ministries to reach new people. Still, most of these churches are seen in the eyes of denominational leaders as "pillar" churches in the community deserving the finest pulpit preachers.

The present reality of these churches may be disheartening for many. However, there was a time when their energy was high, new ministries were launched and leadership expanded. In fact, these churches were launched with all the excitement and creativity of new birth. In addition, these churches also experienced a time in their journey when they expanded from small intimate communities, usually meeting in homes, to occupy the center of the community's culture on the main corner of a burgeoning new downtown. These churches provide examples of congregations rich in all dispositions. The challenge for many of these churches today is to tap into their dispositional experience for another disposition of launching.

## For Clergy and Lay Leaders

### 1. *Leadership interventions are essential to help congregations be more resilient.*

Leaders of congregations, lay and clergy, must shoulder the responsibility to maintain an awareness of the value of all the dispositions. Leaders can enable congregations to avoid getting stuck too long in a particular disposition by participating in periodic assessments that lead to strategic planning for future direction. Interventions keep congregations functioning as fresh and vital centers for spiritual transformation. Therefore, “dispositional adjustments” may need to be made for the short-term in order to ensure long-term health and effectiveness.

### 2. *Recognize your “dispositional” preferences and prejudices.*

Many clergy leaders have a particular disposition in which they excel or feel called. For example, some clergy are especially gifted for the launching disposition. These pastors are most fulfilled when they are engaged in launching new congregations or are actively launching new ministries in existing congregations. In addition to launching new congregations, pastors gifted in launching may also lead congregations into merger ministries or turn a pruning congregation toward a completely new direction. Other leaders are gifted in team building and empowering others to assume more responsibility in leadership and ministry. Others are gifted in knowing how to facilitate organizational and structure change during the deepening disposition. Finally, some have the right prophetic and pastoral care skills to effectively engage a congregation in the pruning disposition.

There is a propensity of some clergy to de-value the deepening and the pruning dispositions because of the pressures of increasing numerical growth, though not many will admit numerical growth to be the primary evaluative benchmark. These prejudices, however, deny congregations of the richness each disposition has to offer a congregation. While no one wants to remain in the pruning disposition for long periods of time, there is no question that pruning ministries may enhance a congregation’s ministry, regardless of the predominant disposition.

### 3. *Leaders must learn when they over-function and under-function.*

Typically, over-functioning pastors will take on the stress and anxiety of trying to solve all the problems without the congregation’s commitment or participation. This often leads to an unholy alliance between the “Messianic complex” and burnout. These pastors believe that, if anything is going to happen, it is up to them. At the same time, they are frustrated that the

congregation is not doing its share of the work, while congregations pick up the signal that they are not invited to partner with pastors.

Under-functioning pastors have given up hope and abdicated their call, waiting for the opportunity to leave for “greener pastures” or retire. These pastors are not available, see themselves doing “good things” outside their local church, and often feel like “victims” of the system. If the congregation should mount up an effort to change, these pastors will find every excuse for this effort not to succeed.

#### *4. Practice the skill of continuous learning.*

The authors maintain that in order for clergy leaders to be effective today they must be intentionally engaged in processes of continuous learning. The opportunities and challenges available to congregations today are unprecedented – among the most unique in the history of the church. Clergy leaders engaged in continuous skill enhancement are better able to lead congregations through a variety of dispositions.

### **For Judicatory Leaders**

#### *1. Establish continuous learning opportunities for both church leaders and congregations.*

Judicatory systems can and must provide opportunities for leaders of congregations to deepen their skills by sponsoring and encouraging participation in a variety of leadership development experiences. Leaders can no longer assume that a static learning lifestyle may suffice in today’s ministry environment. Judicatory agencies must earmark funds for high quality training events and on-going programs of study. Further we suggest that judicatory officials encourage sabbaticals for clergy and require periodic or on-going programs of study for all those who are responsible for the quality of life within the congregations.

#### *2. It would be wise for judicatory leaders to identify pastors with selected dispositional expertise that match the congregation’s dispositional needs or to offer training to pastors in all four dispositions.*

In denominational systems that appoint pastors to local congregations, the judicatory leaders – who provide oversight to congregations and pastors – must match the dispositional reality of a pruning church with pastors who can thrive in that dispositional reality. Another option is to provide training for pastors and lay leaders in all four dispositions.



3. *Create a climate for valuing all dispositional expressions.*

The authors observe a tendency to negatively label the pruning disposition and its characteristics. While it may be true that a pruning congregation may impose a drain on judicatory resources (conflict resolution resources, financial resources, etc), there is much to be gained by all congregations participating in pruning dispositions. Ideally, congregations will become fluent in skills related to all the dispositions.

4. *Value the launching disposition as an essential component for every congregation.*

While this may sound contradictory with the previous assumption, there is value in viewing launching as an essential ingredient for every congregation. The launching disposition ignites congregations with vital energy and an opportunity to renew mission outreach.

5. *What is true about a congregation is also true for the judicatory.*

The characteristics of each disposition can be seen in entire judicatory systems as well. Furthermore, matching judicatory leaders with the dispositions of the judicatory is a step toward responsible strategic planning. Imagine the effectiveness of judicatories that match judicatory leaders with the needs of a particular geographical region. For example, the United Methodist Church might start appointing District Superintendents who possess launching skill sets to districts that are likely to need new church plants.

Taken as a whole these assumptions point to a model that is fluid and dynamic, not limited by time constraints, but able to provide direction for congregations, clergy leaders, and entire judicatory systems.

## Appendix 1: Characteristics for Each Disposition

	<b>Launching</b>	<b>Expanding</b>	<b>Deepening</b>	<b>Pruning</b>
<b>Critical Component</b>	Vision	Community Outreach	Spirituality	Discern present reality/ Cultivate new growth
<b>Leadership</b>	The charisma of leaders create an atmosphere of energy, vitality, expectancy, and confidence	Leaders work tirelessly toward growth and inspiring others toward a vision that is becoming a possibility	Capable pastors bring stability and are often visible within the denomination and community	People are working harder and enjoying it less
<b>Spirituality</b>	Spirituality is played out in vision, faith, and adventure	Spirituality is played out in service	Intentional spirituality balances emphasis on organization design	Friendships and relationships increase but sharing one's faith with others decreases
<b>Risk and Innovation</b>	Leaders inspire others to be risk oriented and free to try to new, innovative ministries	Congregation is bursting at the seams while organization is trying to keep up with ministry	Almost anything can be seen as a risk, especially if it involves the building, the time for worship, educational services for children and youth, and other sacred cows.	The congregation becomes more bureaucratic in nature and the congregation becomes riddled with petty conflicts and blaming. Loyal critics express the necessity of cutting back on programs and ministries; others simply stop attending and go looking for a more vital congregation
<b>Mission</b>	Mission is lived out in new frontiers here and now	Mission is engaging and focused to reach new populations Mood is chaotic but energetic	Mission of the church is to deepen the existing ministries and make them stronger/ more healthy.	As resources dwindle the mission becomes seeking increasing reliance on denominational support
<b>Gift-oriented Ministry</b>	People are excited to be part of something that is new and unknown	Members are valued for their gifts for ministry more than their financial contributions	Gifts become recognized more for their contribution to existing ministries rather than for starting new ministries	People become valued for what they can financially contribute rather than their gifts for ministry
<b>Discipleship</b>	The priority is to develop a community of new "founders"	Older models of discipleship training give way to discipleship making	Focus completely shifts to discipling existing members	All energies go toward providing training to a few long-time members
<b>DNA</b>	DNA takes root consciously or unconsciously	Founding families begin to leave while others become even more entrenched as the church experiences growth.	Founding families are mostly gone or died.	Founding families are all gone. Also gone are the good old days of when the church was vibrant and healthy.
<b>Structure</b>	Push toward feeling chaotic with a simple, informal structure	Informality and freedom experiment with structures that evolve with a life of their own and may not make sense to the outsider	Things are progressing smoothly but some dissatisfaction arises among new members who are trying to "break in" to the existing structure	Business meetings and workers become highly anxious as the hard realities set in, and new leaders find it difficult to realize their full leadership potential
<b>Community</b>	Entire emphasis is on reaching the community for Christ	Deeper connections to the community solidify community reputation	Established relationships with the community	Community serves the church

Vision	Growing a new church	Vision and organization fight for equal time and attention.	Confusion about the difference between vision and mission	Gone
--------	----------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------	------

## Appendix 2: Danger Zones/ Stuck Areas for Each Disposition

	<i>Launching</i>	<i>Expanding</i>	<i>Deepening</i>	<i>Pruning</i>
Critical Components	Over dependence on leader/founder	Church becomes exclusive club	Over emphasis on structure: “You’re perfectly designed to get the results you are getting”	Failure of nerve to move out of comfort zones
Leadership	Congregation develops a dependence upon the leader	Success syndrome: leaders start believing their own press releases about invincible growth and success	“Safety at all costs” begins to dominate leadership thinking	Leader becomes chaplain leading the church to a dignified funeral
Spirituality	Spirituality becomes an individualistic phenomenon with little emphasis on reaching out. There is no balance between the inner and outer dimensions of the spiritual disciplines	Expanding congregations are often prone to get caught up in the “Martha syndrome” where activities are valued more than spirituality and solitude	Neglect of interior, spiritual, and communal life	Rarely is there a “new converts” class as church serves the needs of a dwindling few
Risk and Innovation	The group is blindly committed to the rules for success taken from former church experiences or from copying the latest fad from other growing churches	Growth pains: some original founders leave, facilities are strained, and financial responsibilities increase	Because of years of success, leadership is lulled into thinking that everything is “okay.” Stability and success feel comfortable. A focus on <i>preserving</i> what we have replaces risk and adventure. Definitions of effectiveness are based upon compliance to rules and procedures. Problems inside the organization begin to suck up the energy needed for reaching out “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” mentality begins to dominate leadership decisions.	Members report being tired and lacking energy to do new things. Fear seeks security at all costs. Members are aware that something needs to change but don’t see their own need to make changes
Mission	Founding church families are unable to develop a sense of common mission and outreach or are unwilling to share power with new members	Mission is focused on getting bigger rather than staying relevant with community needs	Mission statements begin showing up on church walls replacing the original “lived out” vision	Older members deny reality and suggestions made by persons who are not “party line” are squelched
Gift-oriented Ministry	Leaders, especially the pastor, feel pressures of carrying too much of the load	Embracing old model of clergy/laity split for ministry – recruiting volunteers without consideration of the volunteer’s calling, passion, and giftedness	People are valued more for what they give financially to the church than for their gifts for ministry	In-fighting increases as members blame one another and seek to displace responsibility
Priority	Founding church families are unable to develop a sense of common mission and outreach or are unwilling to share power with new	No new disciples are made. Much emphasis on discipling existing adherents.	No new disciples are made and there is an absence of “first generation” Christians.	It’s been a long time since anyone can remember making a new disciple for Christ. The existing membership is 60 years of age or older, has

	members			been a Christian for 40 years or more and has been a member of that church for 20 years or more
DNA	DNA is already showing signs for future conflict	Conflict may evolve between founding families and newer people who may have new ideas	The "ghosts" of the founding families remains as blocking forces for change	Founding families may be dead but their influence is still felt as resistance to change
Structure	Develop a formal structure too early that kills, rather than inspires energy and commitment to new ministries	With the need for increasing layers of organization, increasing numbers of volunteer and/or paid "managers" are selected. There is a maxim worth stating here, "Managers don't work, they manage the work. Only workers do the work." With each new layer of management communications become more garbled, and entrepreneurship is diminished	Caught in the activity trap where success is measured by the number of activities as an end in and of themselves versus a means to a larger purpose	Routinization of ministry activities become the norm
Community	Church begins to focus on itself either because of internal conflict, a new facilities issue, or theological issue	Begins to lose connection with community needs	Church loses it's connection with community and community begins to feel like the church doesn't "care."	Members are impervious to the changes happening in society and thus are out of touch with community and national realities
Vision	Growing a church like the one new members remember leaving	Vision becomes blurry as church continues to grow without regard to original vision	Little or no vision that bring vitality to the congregation	The members become stuck in a time warp of a well remembered successful past, but they cannot envision a brighter future

### Appendix 3: Leadership Interventions for Each Disposition

	<b>Launching</b>	<b>Expanding</b>	<b>Deepening</b>	<b>Pruning</b>
Critical Components	Keep talking about the vision and imbed it into founding group	Keep adding new leaders to growing ministry areas	Connect, connect, connect to the community	Either do a great funeral for the church or become insistent on moving the church toward a renewed interest in the community
Leadership	Develop leadership by producing more leaders, not more followers	Expanding congregations require expanding leadership and greater efforts to keep members actively involved in the life and ministry of the congregation	Take time for solitude and other spiritual disciplines in order to discern new and renewed engagement in the community	Become stubbornly unyielding to anything but reaching out to the community. Help the congregation face realities, and develop a plan for transition Offer celebration and dignified burials
Spirituality	Emphasize the spiritual disciplines – as a means of grace to ensure that all members grow spiritually, embrace a sense of mission, and catch a vision for the future of the church	As the balance for spirituality shifts from inner to outer, remember to keep inner discipleship making opportunities a priority	Encourage all members to participate in small (8 – 12 people) covenant communities that are based upon the spiritual disciplines of prayer, scripture, serious spiritual conversation, and acts of mercy	Must become adamant about reaching out to the community even if it means reinventing the church. Work toward achieving balance between inner and outer disciplines. Inner because the work of pruning is hard and outer because community outreach is the key to the future of the church.
Risk and Innovation	Increase the visibility of the church throughout the entire community by every means possible.	Let go of control and responsibility by expanding leadership teams and providing greater volunteer ministry opportunities	Disturb the system to address complacency	Hold hands of older members by reassuring them that their priorities will not be disregarded, but that new ones will be added in order to reach the community
Mission	Revisit the original vision which launched the church or new ministry? Does this vision still make sense today? If so, what needs to be done to bring it into reality? If not, what needs to change and made new?	Keep an eye on the big picture – don't forget to fly the plane!	Pay attention to assess ministry activities in light of mission questions: How does each ministry and activity advance mission? Are there new opportunities in the community that should connect to our mission? Are we challenging people in their callings, giftedness and passion to respond to community needs? What needs are compelling to our members? What new ministries are waiting to be launched in the spiritual soil of new life and possibilities?	Must see the community outside the walls of church as mission

<p>Gift-oriented Ministry</p>	<p>Equip every member for ministry. As such, emphasize the calling, passion and giftedness of each one. This is in contrast to viewing people as willing and capable volunteers vs. unable and unwilling onlookers.</p> <p>a. Use effective gift assessment resources to help people understand their giftedness, and how to employ their gifts to strengthen the ministry of the church. b. Give emphasis to team building and conflict management.</p>	<p>Look for new resources to aid growing ministries</p>	<p>Are there ministries that should be altered, strengthened or given a decent burial?</p> <p>Starting with new members, establish a practice of introducing gift assessment surveys</p>	<p>Immediately introduce new members to gift-assessment process. If church is open, it could reinvent itself by launching a gift-oriented style of ministry and dispose of “nominating” processes</p>
<p>Priority</p>	<p>Continuously emphasize mission questions, such as: Who are we? Who do we want to be in this community? What is our reason for being? What are pressing needs in the community that we can address? Do our identity and reason for being connect with timeless values of scriptures and the timely opportunities in the community?</p>	<p>New, growing ministries will result in the need for discipleship making opportunities for those new people. Always keep adding “first generation” disciples to the church and eventually to the leadership.</p>	<p>Renewed connection with community needs by engaging in demographic studies to determine needs that can be addressed through new programming</p>	<p>Treat new visitors carefully. Don’t scare them away and yet respond to them if they show interest. Gradually integrate them into leadership</p>
<p>DNA</p>	<p>If necessary, work through conflict issues of the DNA as they arise among members of the founding church families</p>	<p>Steward conflict by engaging all leaders in conflict management training. In addition understand the role of resistance and embrace it as a “friend.” Have founding families keep telling the story of the “original” church and vision which undergirded it.</p>	<p>Keep telling the stories of the days when the church was founded. Keep whatever connections still exist with founding families</p>	<p>Talk about the days when the church was founded. What was going on then? What was the community like? How has the community changed since?</p>
<p>Structure</p>	<p>Develop small task force groups to be responsible for various ministries. Have one overarching team to provide oversight to fulfilling ministry dreams, mission</p>	<p>Guard against increasing layers of management that tend to replace vitality and vision with increasing layers of bureaucracy Remember structure is a means to effective</p>	<p>Don’t let the control of resources rule over passion, vision and mission</p>	<p>Develop new teams who will commit themselves to re-launching efforts</p>

	mission; structure is not an end in itself			
Community	Keep the community engaged by participating in community activities.	Keep abreast of new ministry opportunities in the community as a means of providing new ministry opportunities for persons who are eager to volunteer their talents	Launch new ministries that reflect meeting tangible needs in the community	Make renewed commitments to the community by reinventing church. Reinvest in the community by identifying what needs are crying out for your attention and best efforts
Vision	Keep the vision ever before the newly forming congregation. All publications should include descriptions of the vision, as an example.	Revisit original vision. Does it still make sense today? What has changed? What has remained the same?	Start engaging in a visioning process	A new vision must be launched, one that has the community and it's needs as the target.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Argyris, Chris, *Overcoming Organizational Defenses: Facilitating Organizational Learning*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, *Life Together*. New York: Harper & Row, 1954.
- Brueggemann, Walter, "Covenantal Community," *New Conversations* 2, 3 (Winter 1977); 4-9. Published by The United Church Board for Homeland Ministries.
- Cooperrider, David L., Sorensen, Peter F., Jr., Whitney, Diana, and Yaeger, Therese F., eds., *Appreciative Inquiry: Rethinking Human Organization Toward A Positive Theory Of Change*. Champaign, IL: Stipes Publishing, 2000.
- DeGeus, Arie. *The Living Company: Habits for Survival in a Turbulent Business Environment*. Boston MS: Harvard Business School Press, 1997.
- Dillard, Annie, *Teaching a Stone to Talk: Expeditions and Encounters*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1982.
- Elliott, Charles, *Locating the Energy for Change: An Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry*. Winnepeg, Manitoba: International Institute of Sustainable Development, 1999.
- Foster, Richard J., *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth, Revised Edition*. NY: Harper & Row Publ., 1988.
- Friedman, Edwin H., *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*. New York: Guilford Press, 1985. What we mean by DNA is the inter-generational transmission of values and other important elements of the founding generation.
- Friedman, Edwin H, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*. Bethesda, MD: The Edwin Friedman Estate/Trust, 1999.
- Friedman, Edwin H., *Reinventing Leadership: A Discussion Guide*. NY: Guilford Press, 1996.
- Hammond, Sue A, *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry*. Plano, TX: Thin Book Publishing Company, 1996.
- Henderson, Nan, Benard, Bonnie, Sharp-Light, Nancy. *Resiliency In Action: Practical Ideas for Overcoming Risks and Building Strengths in Youth, Families, and Communities*. San Diego, CA: Resiliency In Action, Inc., 1999.
- Heuser, Roger. *Leadership and Team Building: Transforming Congregational Ministry through Teams*. Matthews, NC: CMR Press, 1999.
- Hock, Dee, *Birth of the Chaordic Age*. San Francisco: Berrett Koehler Publishers, 1999.
- King, Martin Luther, Jr., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (J.M. Washington, ed.). New York: Harper & Row, 1986.

- Maurer, Rick, *Beyond the Wall of Resistance: Unconventional Strategies that Build Support for Change*. Austin, TX: Bard Books, Inc., 1996.
- McLaren, Brian D., *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000.
- Palmer, Parker J., *The Active Life: A Spirituality of Work, Creativity, and Caring*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990.
- Quinn, Robert E., *Deep Change: Discovering the Leader Within*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996.
- Quinn, Robert E., *Change the World: How Ordinary People Can Accomplish Extraordinary Results*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000.
- Richardson, Ronald W. *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1996.
- Sanders, T. Irene, *Strategic Thinking and the New Science: Planning in the Midst of Chaos, Complexity, and Change*. NY: The Free Press, 1998.
- Senge, Peter M., *The Fifth Discipline: The Arts & Practice of The Learning Organization*. New York: Doubleday Currency, 1990.
- Stacey, Ralph D., *Managing the Unknowable: Strategic Boundaries Between Order and Chaos in Organizations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992.
- Steinke, Peter L. *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach*. NY: Alban Institute, 1996.
- Steinke, Peter L., *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems*. NY: Alban Institute, 1993.
- Watkins, Jane Magruder and Mohr, Bernard J. *Appreciative Inquiry: Change the Speed of Imagination*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2001.
- Wheatley, Margaret J., *Leadership and the New Science: Learning About Organization from an Orderly Universe*. San Francisco: Berrett Koehler, 1994.
- Wheatley, Margaret J. *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future*. San Francisco, CA: Berritt-Koehler Publ., 2002.
- Whitney, Diana David Cooperrider, Amanda Trosten-Bloom, and Brian S. Kaplin. *Encyclopedia of Positive Questions: Volume One. Using Appreciative Inquiry to Bring Out the Best in Your Organization*. Euclid, OH: Lakeshore Communications, 2002. For an introduction to Appreciative Inquiry, see and.
- Vaill, Peter, *Spiritual Leading and Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998.
- Zohar, Danah. *Spiritual Intelligence: The Ultimate Intelligence*. NY: Bloomsbury Publ., 2000.

Zohar, Danah. *The Quantum Society: Mind, Physics, and a New Social Vision*. NY: William Morrow, 1994.

Zohar, Danah. *The Quantum Self: Human Nature and Consciousness Defined by the New Physics*. NY: William Morrow, 1990.

Zohar, Danah. *Rewiring the Corporate Brain: Using the New Science to Rethink How We Structure and Lead Organizations*. San Francisco, CA: Berritt-Koehler Publ., 1997.