

## We Already Have the Church We Want

For all the talk of changing the church, improving the church, and shifting the paradigm of the church, most leaders and members do not want the church to be any different than it is right now. Most people are generally content with the status quo.

In the book *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* by Hiefetz, Gashow, and Linsky, they write about the illusion of the broken system. This is what they write: “There is a myth that the organization needs to change because it is broken. The reality is that any social system is the way it is because the people in that system want it that way. In that sense, on the whole, on balance, the system is working fine, even though it may appear to be “dysfunctional” in some respects to some members and outside observers, and even though it faces danger just over the horizon. There is no such thing as a dysfunctional organization, because every organization is perfectly aligned to achieve the results it currently gets.”

“No one who tries to name or address the dysfunction in an organization will be popular. Enough important people like the situation exactly as it is, whatever they may say about it, or it would not be the way it is... Embarrassing or not, the organization prefers the current situation to trying something new where the consequences are unpredictable and likely to involve losses for key parties... The American automobile industry is perhaps the most dramatic example of an extremely well-functioning, highly complex set of organizations “aligned perfectly to get the results it currently gets” as it crashed headlong into adaptive pressures about which it had been warned for decades, since the first shocks in the late 1970s and the growing awareness of global warming in the 1980s and 1990s. The adaptive failures, resplendent by late 2008, can only be diagnosed in the context of the highly distributed, entrenched stakes of so many.”

If this is true, and I believe it is, this means that your congregation is perfectly aligned to achieve the results you are currently getting. If your church is caring for the sick and the poor, you are probably designed to do that. If you are losing members, you are probably designed to do that. If you are active in your neighborhood, you are probably designed to do that. If you are mostly focused inward on yourself, you are probably designed to do that. What results are you seeing in your ministry? If you want to see different results, you will need to align yourself differently, and the presbytery can help you do that.

If you see dysfunction in your congregation and you speak up about it, you will not be popular. That is not a message many people are open to hearing, particularly if they feel the church is “working” for them. There are certain leadership skills that need to be developed to have this conversation effectively.

Most congregations prefer the predictable current situation, even if it’s not producing a lot of fruit for Christ, than to try something new where the consequences are unpredictable and might involve some loss for people in the church. We tend to stay with what we know. Many have become cynical and skeptical about trying new things that might make our ministry better. But, it’s really not about us, it’s about God. And the

question is what is God doing in our neighborhood? What does Jesus want to do there? How is the Holy Spirit calling us to join the mission of God that is already on the move in our communities? And how would our congregations need to change to participate more fully in the misio dei (the mission of God)?

In the early to mid-1900s, some of the same people who led the American automobile industry were also members and leaders in the Presbyterian Church. They were very intelligent leaders, with lots of technical skills, and plenty of information about how the world was changing, yet they were not able to change the culture of their organizations and make the adaptive shifts necessary to help their companies move into a new season of life. The church in North America today is running the same risk. And chances are, the federal government is not going to bail us out. The presbytery exists to help your congregation make the transitions it needs to make, so that you can have a faithful, fruitful, viable ministry for many, many years into the future. As we begin a new year here in September, let's pray and work and talk together, about how we can be a learning community, making the shifts God wants us to make, so that we can continue to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. God bless you,

Clark Cowden