

Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 27

Coaching Small Congregations toward Positive Change

Why are we gifting you this volume? Because the mission statement of our primary publication—*The Parish Paper: New Ideas for Active Congregations*—is to help the largest possible number of congregations achieve maximum effectiveness in their various ministries. *The Parish Paper* is a monthly newsletter whose subscribers receive copyright permission to distribute to their constituents—more than two million readers in 28 denominations. Go to www.TheParishPaper.com for subscription information.

Purpose of this Volume: Provides in-depth answers to questions that readers of *The Parish Paper* ask regarding principles and procedures by which pastors can encourage congregations that average fewer than 125 in worship attendance to move beyond change-resistance toward maximum health and effectiveness.

Possible Uses: a four-session group study by several pastors or study by an individual pastor.

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How to Use this Resource

Fact #1: Information on paper does not equal transformation in congregations. Knowing does not equal doing.

Fact #2: Growth in pastoral leadership abilities more often results from discussions with respected peers than from solitary reading of a document.

Therefore: this resource provides a study/discussion process through which a group of small-church pastors can develop new awareness, insights, and action-directions.

Biblical Basis for this Study/Discussion Process

“Without counsel plans go wrong, but with many advisers they succeed (Proverbs 15:22).”

“The ear of the wise seeks knowledge (Proverbs 18:15).”

“Behold, I make all things new (Revelation 21:5).”

Unfolding this Study/Discussion Process

Step #1: If used as a four-meeting group study, discuss in the opening session the purpose of this experience:

To provide practical, proven principles and procedures by which pastors can encourage congregations that average fewer than 125 in worship attendance to move beyond change-resistance toward maximum health and effectiveness.

This is *not* group therapy, but it is more than a mere academic experience:

- Ask each participant to state what she or he hopes to gain from this study.
- Agree on some parameters for the discussion, such as “honest expression of feelings, but no personal attacks or criticisms of other group members.”

This study/discussion resource assumes that (a) the discussion leader has some training and skill in the basics of group process, (b) everyone realizes that at a few points the discussions may surface matters that could be painful or contentious, and (c) every participant enters the group discussions with an honest desire for insight and the willingness to talk through such issues.

Step #2: Appoint a discussion leader, elect a discussion leader, or agree that four different pastors from within the group will each lead one of the four discussion meetings.

Step #3: Schedule four, two-hour discussions. Download a free copy of *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 27, Coaching Small Congregations toward Positive Change* for each pastor from the [www.TheParishPaper](http://www.TheParishPaper.com) Web site.

Step #4: Ask every pastor-participant to prepare for each discussion by reading the material in that section of this resource.

Study/Discussion Session #1

Pastors. Prepare for this discussion session by making notes in the margins, especially with regard to the following questions:

1. Do you know of instances in which an insight in this paragraph or section seems to apply to a pastor or congregation?
2. What would you like to add or subtract from this paragraph or section?
3. In what ways do you feel that an insight in this section or paragraph applies to you or the congregation you serve?

Discussion Leader. As you move through this discussion session, ask participants to take turns sharing their answers to the above questions.

Change is a constant with every organism. Few changes are neutral. Most changes are either positive or negative. For example, as the youth grows into an adult, most physical and mental changes are positive. Later in life, he or she arrives at the invisible moment when most changes become negative: the body begins a quiet but certain reduction in efficiency, moving inexorably toward old age and the cemetery.

Congregational change is also a constant that is seldom neutral. A church either moves toward maximum health and effectiveness in mission and ministries or moves toward extinction preceded by shrinking enthusiasm, volunteer efforts, and financial resources.

The constant change that happens in human beings and congregations differs in one BIG way. A church can move toward extinction for several years, losing its health and effectiveness, and then reverse its direction. Example:

- A New England church established in 1717, grew to more than 600 in average worship attendance during its first two centuries, and then declined over the next thirty years to only 50 worshipers.
- The church then entered a new era of health and effectiveness, and it now exceeds 300 in worship attendance.

Recurring cycles of health and effectiveness are not a certainty in any congregation; some churches decline and disappear. But renewal of congregational vitality is always a possibility.

Some principles of congregational change-coaching are universal. These principles apply to churches of *every size*. Study/Discussion Session #1 outlines several universal principles of congregational change-coaching.

Other principles of congregational change-coaching are size specific: Pastors that serve small, midsize, large, and mega churches encourage them toward maximum health and effectiveness in ways that have little in common with churches in the other three size categories. Sessions #2 through #4 illustrate ways in which effective pastors apply those size-specific principles in congregations that average fewer than 125 in worship attendance.

A. Different types of change require different approaches. Some types of change require far more skill than other types. Every proposed change falls into one of the following two categories.

First-Order Reactive Change: incremental course corrections as a response to unpleasant circumstances. Example: adjusting the thermostat after four teachers complain about cold rooms.

Second-Order Proactive Change: major alteration of the entire system to prevent a detrimental future outcome. Example: after years of declining elementary Sunday school attendance, shifting to the “Rotation Model,” a totally different learning method. (See www.rotation.org for a description; obtain curriculum titled *PowerExpress* at www.cokesbury.com)

First-order reactive change requires *transactional* leadership: “I’ll do this for you if you will do that.” Translation: “I’ll turn up the thermostat if you stop complaining.”

Second-order proactive change requires *transformational* leadership. Example: “Should we discuss the possibility of replacing our elementary classes with a completely new approach that (a) achieves our Christian education goals and (b) doubles attendance?”

Proactive transformational leadership requires a complex mixture of skills. A few examples:

1. Transformational leaders show consistent trustworthiness in their servant-hood and role-authority behaviors.
2. Transformational leaders exhibit excellent relational skills with the congregation’s members and lay leaders. An old bromide says that most leaders are either task-oriented or people-oriented. Transformational leaders excel at both.
3. Transformational leaders recruit many willing workers and learn how to manage the 5 percent who are control-addicts.
4. Transformational leaders place in leadership roles people whose track records indicate they are effective leaders.
5. Transformational leaders involve several lay leaders in effective planning for the future.
6. Transformational leaders persistently energize people to look at big-picture issues. Their leadership methods extend far beyond the boundaries of “I will do this for you if you do that for me.” They ask questions such as, “What would we need to do to double our Sunday school attendance? What would it take to grow our worship attendance from 90 to 150?”
7. Transformational leaders recognize that people less often change what they do because someone gives them *analysis* that shifts their *thinking*—than because someone *shows* them a truth that influences their *feelings*. (John P. Kotter, *The Heart of Change* [Boston: Harvard Business School Press], p. 1)
8. Transformational leaders focus much of their energy on one-to-three priorities crucial to the congregation’s future health, rather than spending all of their time on problems that require transactional fixes.
9. Transformational leaders repeatedly cast God’s vision regarding those one-to-three big-picture priorities.
10. Transformational leaders work hard, passionately, and persistently to achieve those one-to-three crucial visions. Example: A pastor retired after thirty years in the same congregation. He understood that relational skills, vision, and hard work accomplish much. The church grew in numbers and ministries. At age seventy-eight he became part-time interim pastor of a 100-year-old, rural congregation, membership twenty-five. Three years later, membership reached 150. The church had completed a quarter-million-dollar building campaign, and he was awaiting replacement by a full-time seminary graduate.

Summary: Does your congregation need transformational leadership? If so, which of the ten skills listed above need implementation?

B. Understand the anatomy of change resistance. Like individuals, organizations use ego defenses such as denial, rationalization, and fantasy to maintain their self-identities. They fear forging new self-identities and developing new competencies.

People do not process change-proposals rationally. Change-permission happens at the emotional level, not the rational level. The process by which individuals emotionally commit to change unfolds in three stages:

Awareness: “I know a change is happening.”

Buy-in: “I believe this change will benefit the congregation and me.”

Ownership: “I take personal responsibility for helping to implement this change.”

Awareness of these three stages helps you abandon the myth that change is an event. Change is a process. Appeal to multiple audiences over a long time-period. Seek feedback. Find out whether your message is moving beyond information-transfer to emotional ownership.

Develop answers to classic change-reaction questions:

- *What are you changing?* Translation: Can you explain it clearly? Can you explain it in less than sixty seconds? Better still, can you explain it in one sentence that pictures the change and its benefits?
- *What will be different because of the change?* Translation: The people from whom change requires a *behavior* change need to know precisely what behavior you are asking them to change.
- *Who will lose what because of this change?* Translation: Endings come before beginnings. Even the changes that bring people positive benefits begin with some kind of loss, a setting aside of familiar routines. (William Bridges, *Managing Transitions*)

Develop a game plan for managing change reactions. Plan steps such as the following:

1. Avoid taking emotional change-resistant statements personally. As reliably as water runs downhill, the threat of change produces resistance to change.
2. Avoid blaming people who make change-resistance remarks.
3. Realize that people’s initial reaction to a new idea often bares little similarity to their final opinion about it at a later date. With time to think, resistance can change to acceptance.
4. Ask people how they feel. Change resistance is rarely rational. Look for and try to address the emotional threat they fear.
5. Help people identify differences between this change and similar ideas that did not work.
6. Put change-resistant people on a committee to develop implementation procedures. Let them exert their “control needs” that way, rather than via resistance to the change-idea itself.
7. Pay more personal attention to change-resistant people. Sometimes, resisting change is a way to command attention.
8. Let others in your board, committee, or group answer change objections. Peer pressure often disarms change reaction far better than pastor pressure.
9. Give it time to percolate. Avoid rushing something to a vote before change reactions can mature beyond initial resistance-reactions.
10. Avoid letting fear of change reaction prevent change proposals.

Summary: treat change as an *emotional process*, not a *rational event*.

C. Practice the principles of safe change. A parishioner wrote, “Our church has longevity, a rich heritage, and important traditions. However, too many older people who do not like change run our congregation.

“Our membership has declined for two decades. We have very few young adult families and less than a half dozen teenage youth.

“Yet, the majority of our board members vote against the necessary changes.

What can we do?”

The consultant responded with ten suggestions:

1. *Build self-esteem.* Many once-strong-but-now-declining-membership churches feel endangered. Board members frightened about the future cling to the security of their cherished traditions, so they unconsciously resist essential insights. Understanding that “mental color-blindness,” change-coaching leaders affirm those cherished traditions before they try to change them.
2. *Identify a crisis.* Make sure this is a “consensus crisis” on which most members agree, not just a “potential crisis” that is far out on the horizon.
3. *Strengthen trust.* Spend time with and genuinely care about each individual governing board member. Anxiety increases when people consider changes. Change-coaching leaders reduce anxiety through warm personal relationships, not through the brilliance of logic and frontal attacks on bronzed traditions.
4. *Increase the level of discontent.* Slowly turn up the burner of urgency. Create numerous opportunities for discussing the crisis over several months. People need time to reflect. They often change their minds after, rather than during, meetings.
5. *Beautify the proposed change.* Make field trips. Gather information from congregations that made a similar change. Let board members experience themselves toward a new way of thinking.
6. *If possible, experiment with change before making a final decision.* Saying that “we will evaluate this after several months” reduces anxiety.
7. *Suggest that this change is a way to reclaim our heritage.* Lead a charge back to the good old days or “back to the basics.” People love to follow leaders who connect the future with the past.
8. *Connect the change with a biblical mandate.* People feel more secure with a change that seems to serve God more effectively.
9. *Announce the change as a way to express love and concern.* “Love your neighbor” is a widely affirmed biblical principle. If not changing appears to violate that principle, change begins to look better than not changing.
10. *Remember that a few board members will resist the change to the end and beyond.* Rational thinking, warm sincerity, and personal caring never grant you total immunity from a short list of irrational people. Love them anyway.

What are the great traditions in your church? Affirm them! Build on them! What are the change-resisting traditions? Help people move beyond them!

D. Use effective motivation procedures. People who attain great goals influence the people around them to see the benefit of each goal—both to themselves and to their organization—and to work together for its achievement.

Whatever their roles in a congregation, people who achieve significant results build and motivate teams of people.

The coordinated efforts of a group win victories that Lone Ranger personalities find impossible.

Motivational communication contains content such as the following. (Adapted from George Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church* [Nashville: Word Publishing], p. 166)

List below each item one way by which you could do that in the congregation you serve:

- Address issues that matter to people in this group.

- Repeatedly fuel their focus on a compelling vision.

- Offer them a concise, significant, and challenging role in fulfilling the vision.

- Package the vision in captivating ideas, persuasive words, and an inspiring example.

- Describe in reasonable terms your expectations regarding their performance.

- Support them with resources, guidance, encouragement, and rewards.

- Always place the needs of the people ahead of the needs of program accomplishment.

- Provide generous praise, selflessly and genuinely deflecting credit to the entire team.

- Celebrate each small win along the path to the ultimate vision.

E. Exert spiritual, not just organizational and psychological, leadership. Pastors in spiritually transformed and transforming churches emphasize the following spiritual behaviors:

1. *Preach, talk, and teach a “God is alive” theology.* A consultant interviewing a layperson in a healthy, growing congregation asked what their pastor did best.

The man replied, “Communicates a live God to people.”

Effective spiritual leaders provide more than psychological help, more than good ideas, more than emotional experiences, more than a social group. They encourage people to make a spiritual connection with God. They do not confuse the bread of life with the crumbs of religion.

When people think God is alive, they think God is present rather than historical. That conviction translates into what theologians call a “high Christology.” God is incarnated in present-day culture to transform the quality of individual lives. For people in churches that teach a high Christology, the Bethlehem stable is a continuous event. God is still among us. He still walks the Emmaus Roads of daily life, communicating with people who are willing to talk with him.

2. *Preach, talk, and teach the value of personal prayer.* A pastor facing life-threatening heart surgery visited the office of a clergy friend. In case anything went wrong, he wanted his friend to preach his funeral. After they chatted a few minutes, his friend said, “Let’s go down to the prayer room.” The two entered a small room that contained an altar and kneeling rail. His friend prayed for his safe passage through and recovery from the surgery, revealing in his prayer that he had listened carefully to every aspect of his friend’s emotional stress.

Later, after surgery, the pastor told his daughter how much his friend’s prayer had meant to him. She said, “No wonder that church has more than 1,000 people in worship each Sunday. My pastor would have listened empathetically and given me a pep talk about how capable my surgeon is. Even if our church had a prayer room, I doubt he would use it.”

Everyone has a spirit of some kind, and that spirit can change with circumstances. People can have a peaceful spirit, a negative spirit, an angry spirit, a fearful spirit, or some other kind of spirit. Spiritually skilled pastors know that the best way to help people shift to a new spirit is by helping them connect with the spirit of Christ. Prayer is the primary way that happens, which is why scripture urges us 103 times to “ask.”

3. *Preach, talk, and teach the life-transforming power of Bible study.* College courses such as “The Bible as Literature” have educational value.

- However, transmitting facts is not a church’s primary purpose; changing lives is the goal.
- Thus, we have a biblical book titled *The Acts of the Apostles*, not *The Thoughts of the Apostles* or *The Ideas of the Apostles*.

H. Richard Niebuhr warned against “biblicism,” reminding us that such an approach makes scripture the object of its study, instead of God. (*Reflections*, Summer-Fall 1995)

- “Biblioatry” can block God’s truth by putting it into unusable, deadening forms.
- Yet “rationalolatry” can be as dangerous for some congregations as fundamentalism is for others.

Rational thinking, when divorced from a spiritual focus, becomes an invisible form of “salvation by intellectual good works.”

- The Christian faith is not merely right behavior (as some moralists would tell us).
- The Christian faith is not merely right thinking (a viewpoint that many conservatives and liberals share, which explains why they argue so vehemently).
- Nor is Christian faith merely right feeling, as some congregations seem to emphasize in their worship format and content.

Christian faith is a gift God gives to people who form and maintain a right relationship with him. That is the primary objective of Bible study in transformed and transforming churches. Their Bible study concentrates on helping people to form and maintain a personal relationship with God.

The people in an African coastal village were physically stronger, more mentally alert, and more culturally advanced than their relatives in the country's interior. A physician discovered why: the seacoast families got adequate protein from their diet of fish.

We are what we eat—in more ways than one! Pastors who facilitate positive change feed people spiritual food.

4. Remember that a few people—despite the positive results evident from making changes—will continue to resist the changes that produced those results. Rational thinking, warm sincerity, and personal caring do not grant leaders immunity from the lunatic fringe.

Continuing to care about these people requires a spiritual attitude, not an emotional or psychological method.

- Love them anyway.
- Repeatedly express appreciation to them.
- Pray for them by name, daily.
- Disregard their attempts toward negative influence.

Ask God to give you the same feelings toward such people that Jesus possessed when he looked down from the cross and said of the soldiers who killed him, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:24)

5. Refuse to INTERNALIZE the criticism of that 5 percent of people in every congregation who are perpetually critical. In her book, *The Comfort Trap*, Judith Sills quotes a Buddhist parable: an enemy shoots an arrow at your heart. It falls short and lies at your feet. Now you have two choices. You can finish the job, or you can turn and walk away.

Every pastor makes that choice regarding the dissident 5 percent.

- Healthy, effective pastors see the arrow laying there at their feet.
- They continue to care about the persons who shoot arrows, but they turn and walk away.

Effective pastors do not allow a short list of antagonists to paralyze a congregation's forward momentum.

- They hear the dogs barking and respect their right to bark.
- But effective pastors know that most of the barking is rooted in internal fears rather than in reality.

Such pastors claim the freedom of mind that stands clear of and remains detached from destructive and/or irrational perceptions and habits.

F. Provide a balanced theological perspective. Every pastor possesses, articulates, and promotes through preaching and teaching a set of attitudes and behaviors that either *are* or *are not* consistent with the attitudes and behaviors of Jesus and the apostolic New Testament church. Healthy, effective congregations possess and live out those apostolic attitudes and behaviors. Unhealthy, ineffective churches have lost or discarded those apostolic attitudes and behaviors.

1. *The Congregation's Ethos.* This invisible yet powerful quality is the fundamental character or spirit of a church's culture. In spontaneous, recurring patterns, ethos is the underlying sentiment that drives and refuels a church's beliefs, attitudes, customs, and practices. (Erwin Raphael McManus, *The Unstoppable Force* [Orange: California: Yates & Yates, 2001] p. 97)

- *Healthy*, effective congregations consistently (a) *live by faith in God's guidance*, (b) *are known by their love*, and (c) *speak words of hope*. (1 Corinthians 13:13) A congregational culture of faith, hope, and love is capable of transforming individuals and the communities in which individuals live. "People are looking for something worth believing in, somewhere to belong, and something to become. In the contexts of an apostolic ethos, those intrinsic longings of the human spirit are called out and then find their fulfillment... Faith, love, and hope are not foundations, they are wellsprings." (*The Unstoppable Force*, pp. 162-163)
- *Unhealthy*, ineffective congregations are weak in either (a) their faith in God's guidance, (b) their love toward people inside and outside the church, or (c) their hope in the future, or weak in all three. God cannot bless an organization that does not embody all three of these apostolic qualities.

2. *The Congregation's Core Values.* Many congregations become frustrated when they set important goals and make plans, then fail to arrive at the destination they so carefully selected. Those failures often happen because congregations *always act on their core values*, not on the goals they set! Congregations *always act according to their core values*, not according to their plans. Unfortunately, a congregation's core values are always partially invisible to its leaders, submerged in "the way we have always done things here."

- Jesus taught his first disciples three core values through The Great Commandment and The Great Commission (Acts 2:41-42, Luke 10:25-37, Matthew 28:19-20).
- Christ's three core values summarize as follows: (a) Help people grow spiritually in their relationship with God. (b) Love our neighbors in church, community, and world. (c) Offer Christ to people outside our walls.

The emphasis on or neglect of one or two of Christ's three core values determine a church's destiny:

- *Unhealthy* ineffective congregations give most of their emphasis and energy to *one* of Christ's three core values. Their clergy and lay leadership tend to consciously or unconsciously believe the myth that Christ's *other two* core values happen automatically, as a byproduct of focusing on the *one* core value about which they feel the most passionate. In other words, when clergy and lay leadership make Christ's three core values a multiple-choice question, they produce *unhealthy*, ineffective congregations.
- *Healthy* effective congregations give all three of Christ's core values equal emphasis and energy.

One pastor and congregation developed a mission statement that graphically depicts this balance in values. (First United Methodist Church, Roscoe, Texas) They printed the graphic and its message on a business card and distribute it to the parishioners—who sometimes hand that card to people they invite to attend worship.

The front of the attractive four-colored card has the following on it:

Name of church
Church telephone number
Church website
Pastor's E-mail address

At the lower left is an L-shaped graphic:

- The vertical arm of the “L” is an arrow pointing up, labeled “Upward.”
- The horizontal arm of the “L” is an arrow pointing to the right, labeled “Outward.”
- Inside the “L” is an arrow pointing at a 45 degree angle toward its corner, labeled “Inward.”

The body text on the card's upper right reads:

“Our Purpose is to be a family of Christians who, in servant love, fearlessly reach **upward** to God, **inward** to one another, and **outward** to our physically and spiritually needy community and world to make disciples for Jesus Christ.”

The back of the card reads:

The Great Commandment Luke 10:27

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

The Great Commission Matthew 28:19-20

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Study/Discussion Session #2

Pastors. Prepare for this discussion session by making notes in the margins, especially with regard to the following questions.

1. Do you know of instances in which an insight in this paragraph or section seems to apply to a pastor or a congregation?
2. What would you like to add or subtract from this paragraph or section?
3. In what ways do you feel that an insight in this section or paragraph applies to you or the congregation you serve?

Discussion Leader. As you move through this discussion session, ask participants to take turns sharing their answers to the above questions.

Guiding a small-membership congregation toward the polar star of positive change is a complex navigational challenge—much more like polishing a multifaceted diamond than firing one silver bullet. This study/discussion session reviews several facets of that diamond: ways in which pastors can strengthen their change-coaching skills.

Interviews with several dozen highly effective small-church pastors suggest that the following principles are of special value in coaching congregations that average fewer than 125 in worship attendance toward positive change while minimizing the damage change-reactions can cause. Much appreciation is owed to those small-church pastors who so unselfishly shared their precious time, valuable insights, and marvelous methods.

A. Build a positive relationship with each parishioner. The small church is a family, so the pastor must become part of the family and behave like a family member. As in a family, caring about the corporate entity—the congregation—does not substitute for caring about and building a positive relationship with each individual member of that family:

- The pastor becomes God’s caring presence in the midst of the family.
- That involves personal attention and support in each person’s major life and death experiences.

Only when that happens does the family feel sufficiently cohesive and united to move forward into new ideas and ministry efforts.

1. Regularly spend time with and genuinely care about each individual. Anxiety increases when new people enter the family. What if the new pastor does not like me? What if the new pastor wants to make major changes in our family?

- Change-coaching pastors reduce anxiety by building trust—which comes through warm personal relationships that grow out of listening, appreciating, and communicating—not through the brilliance of logic and frontal attacks on bronzed traditions.
- Love is the primary change-agent tool in small churches, not ideas or programs.

One pastor suggests this formula: “You must (a) preach the gospel (the movement of God in peoples’ lives), (b) love the people, and (c) effectively deal with conflict.” What if you lack competence in one of the last two roles? Your skill in the first role becomes irrelevant!

2. *One pastor says that people are in small churches because they want to be loved.* Therefore, the pastor must prove that he or she is a loving person by giving personal attention to individuals:

- That pastor, upon arrival, announced as one of her goals learning names and their relationships within the first two weeks.
- She asked each person to help her achieve that goal by volunteering their name and family relationships the first few times they talked.

Subsequently, that pastor began sending a birthday card and an anniversary card to every person in the congregation.

3. *Positive relationships between pastor and people do NOT build because the new pastor likes the people in this congregation.* Rather, positive relationships build because each individual congregant *believes that the pastor likes him or her.* Parishioners sense how clergy person feels toward them. They can always tell when they are being “coped with, manipulated, or outsmarted,” and they usually resent it. “It won’t matter if the other person tries managing by walking around, sitting on the edge of the chair to practice active listening, inquiring about family members in order to show interest, or using any other skill learned in order to be more effective. What we’ll know and respond to is how that person is *regarding* us when doing these things.” (Glenn Daman, *Leadership and Self-Deception* [Grand Rapids: The Arbinger Institute, Inc.] page 27)

4. *Caring and listening skills rank higher on the scale of importance to people in small churches than do speaking skills.* Many of the best caring and counseling opportunities come at informal, unplanned times. Thus, the pastor must increase the incidence of those informal, unplanned opportunities.

Begin building a platform on which those informal, unplanned opportunities can happen upon arrival in the church:

- Visit each parishioner’s home to get acquainted. For a great many people—perhaps as much as 95 percent of small-church members—the complaint, “He’s never been in my home!” equals “He does not care about me!”
- In some instances, especially in small towns, visiting workplaces is a helpful step in treating people as individuals rather than as couples. This overcomes the tendency of some spouses to do all the talking; thus, cutting off get-acquainted possibilities with the other spouse.
- In these home and workplace visits, get people to tell you their story with questions such as, “Tell me about yourself.” Find out what they value in their church experiences. Find out what they would like to do and to see happen in the next few years.

Maintain that positive relationship with an annual “How is it going?” visit to the home—with absolutely no purpose other than to listen and care.

5. *Generally speaking, long pastoral tenures more often build the positive relationships that result in positive changes.* Short tenures tend to defeat long-term congregational health. The longer his or her tenure, the more authority lay leaders give the pastor for coming up with new ideas.

But a long tenure does not *guarantee* creativity and positive changes:

- Some small-church pastors with long tenures possess mediocre change-agent abilities.
- Such pastors merely enjoy long-term relationships, or they prefer to avoid the stresses associated with moving to a different church, or they do not like to make changes.

Long tenures in small churches more often happen under one or more of the following circumstances: (1) bi-vocational pastorates, (2) older clergypersons who have their families

raised, (3) older clergy no longer burdened with seminary debt payments, (4) older clergy who have finished climbing the professional ego ladder, (5) clergy who have a special preference for staying in this community or area, and (6) clergy who do not see their present congregation as a short-term stepping stone to serving a larger congregation.

6. Pastors can help parishioners move past the mental obstacle inherent in short-term pastorates by building a congregational environment in which people discover and build on the ideas in their own hearts and minds. A parishioner-centered approach gets much more powerful and longer-lasting results than does attempting to motivate parishioners to implement the new pastor's ideas. Many of the parishioners have been down that road before. They know that most of those trips are built on the stairs of sand that collapse when that pastor leaves.

7. Change proposals produce change reactions. Some are positive. Many are negative. A few are explosive. How can a small-church pastor coach the congregation toward maximum health and effectiveness with minimal change-reaction damage? Positive interpersonal relationships build trust, which is the foundation stone for all new idea construction. A positive relationship with parishioners is not the only thing that matters, but in the absence of this ingredient few other methods get the opportunity to matter.

B. Frequently state the value of this congregation and its traditions. The natural fear of losing people and losing long-established traditions creates a natural change-resistance. Then, too, all human beings have a natural preference for doing what they know how to do rather than what they do *not* know how to do. Thus, effective small-church pastors affirm cherished traditions before they try to change them or add new traditions. Changes inevitably trample on someone's positive memories. Affirm *all* positive memories before trying to change them.

1. Tell the people that they already are what you want them to be! One pastor who took that approach said, "When I first arrived, I started telling people how marvelous they were and how wonderful the church was; at that time my statements were not true! In a couple of years, however, my affirmations were accurate! The congregation became what it had not been before."

2. Praise and encourage people at every opportunity. Gradually, you begin to grasp "how we do things around here" and who has always been in charge of what:

- Every small congregation wants a pastor; yet, every small congregation is lay led, not pastor led.
- Count on this: three to six people have unwritten and often unelected leadership roles that they have played for years or decades.
- The small congregation views these individuals as its leaders, not the pastor, regardless of his or her abilities.

The effective pastor identifies those unofficial leaders and their roles as soon as possible. Unfolding a new future for the congregation ALWAYS involves working *with* those power brokers. Inadvertently usurping their roles or working *against* them spells failure for both the pastor and the change idea.

The effective small-church pastor practices John Maxwell's often-quoted maxim that pastors have no power, but pastors have influence. Exerting that influence through a caring, chaplain-like relationship with the key lay leaders helps to achieve maximum positive change.

C. Remember that personality, not just methods, facilitates positive change. Personality qualities that influence the effectiveness of small-church pastors include the following:

1. To many parishioners an outgoing, extraverted pastor communicates personal love and acceptance. Yet many effective pastors do not possess that natural trait:

- Without exception, however, effective small-church pastors who are prone toward introverted behavior (drawing more energy from being alone than from being with other people) learn how to behave in extroverted ways in short sprints.
- When such pastors are in crowds and/or chatting with individuals, many parishioners do not experience them as introverts.

Extroverted behavior—the centering of thinking and conversation on other people in the room—communicates to parishioners that their pastor is not self-centered and egotistical. By contrast, introverted behavior—the centering of thinking and conversation on oneself—communicates to parishioners that their pastor is a narcissistic, egotistical religious pundit. In their group and individual interactions, effective small-church pastors do not come across as, “I’m God’s gift to you.” Rather, they communicate, “You are God’s gift,” and “You are God’s gift to me.”

2. Effective small-church pastors exhibit genuineness and transparency. They are not aloof and unwilling to admit personal foibles. Pastoral genuineness is extremely important to younger adults:

- Experts say that people who grew up watching hundreds of thousands of TV commercials become quite adept at spotting leaders who attempt to manipulate them instead of care about them.
- Then, too, one-half of young adults grew up in homes broken by divorce; they learned early on that people and relationships are not always what they seem on the surface.

Pastoral genuineness is also extremely important to the oldest adult church members. They were not raised watching TV or watching marriages dissolve, but they have been around the track enough times to spot phony leaders.

No age group wants a pastor who aspires to do good without being good, who is merely working at a job instead of caring about a church family.

3. Effective small-church pastors exhibit enthusiasm regarding their congregation’s future possibilities. Enthusiasm—contrasted with ho-hum neutrality or pessimism regarding what God can yet do in and through this congregation—fuels hope. Out of hopeful feelings comes a reduction in negativity, an increase in parishioner energies, new ideas, new creativity, and new viewpoints that see new days pregnant with new possibilities. One result: a reduction in change-resistance.

4. Effective small-church pastors possess the type of humility found in aggressive learners. They collect ideas from parishioners, books, and other small churches. They never see themselves as people who know everything there is to know about this type of ministry:

- They always feel there is more to learn.
- That attitude helps them to listen more carefully than pastors whose eternal persuasion is, “Let me tell you how that needs to be done!”

Such humility and willingness to learn grows trust and respect among the people with whom they serve God.

5. *Effective small-church pastors do not see themselves as the identity of the congregation.* Effective small-church pastors respect the vision of the congregation and its leaders. These clergy exhibit by word and deed their willingness to let a congregation and its leaders be who they are, not merely who the pastor wants them to be.

6. *Effective small-church pastors do not have a savior mentality.* They know that many of the answers to needed changes are in the hearts and minds of the congregation's members. Nor does an effective small-church pastor play into the "rescue fantasy" that several church members inevitably project on the screen of their new pastor: he or she will rescue us from our difficulties!

Both the savior mentality and the rescue fantasy are destructive, since they center the possibility of positive changes in one person. Such delusions always lead to considerable personal pain, both for the parishioners and the pastor.

7. *Effective small-congregation pastors exhibit a fun-loving style.* They are serious people, but they are not serious all the time. They come across as fun-loving individuals with a sense of humor:

- "Keep people laughing," one pastor says.
- Humor (a) helps people to laugh at their anxieties regarding change, (b) helps forward-looking parishioners disregard the 5 percent of naysayers in every congregation who actively resist new ideas, and (c) helps a short list of neurotic and/or obsessive-compulsive individuals lighten up enough to make idea contributions.

Corporate research validates this trait. Staff creativity is much higher in organizations where the leader sets a fun-loving tone. Practical experience validates this trait. Staff members are more likely to stay in touch with and feel open to discussing ideas with a fun-loving leader than with a pastor who perpetually communicates a funeral-serious demeanor.

D. Connect with the community in which the congregation serves. In small churches—especially when they are located in small towns of fewer than 10,000 population—the pastor must visibly demonstrate love for the community in which the congregation ministers:

- One element of that visibility means the pastor sees and is seen by many of the members—especially the younger church members—at community events.
- That visibility facilitates (a) their pastoral bond with him/her, (b) their willingness to adopt him/her into their extended family, (c) the likelihood that they will contact him for help regarding personal matters, and (d) their feeling that he/she is part of the community, as opposed to serving as an isolated religious functionary.
- Then, too, small-town church members more often view caring for the people who live in their community—outside their congregation—as part of their caring responsibilities than do church members in cities.

Thus, the effective small-town small-church pastor must connect in positive ways with the community culture, customs, traditions, and leaders—not just with the church and its members.

1. *Small-town pastors most allow people in the community to adopt them into the community family.* This happens by attending high school football games, county fairs, and FFA events in rural communities. In a few small communities, appropriate community involvement may include attending school board meetings; if so, clergy must carefully avoid taking sides in the petty disagreements common to the school boards in small communities. Nor should a clergyperson run for an elected public office, such as the school board, since that inevitably embroils him or her in conflicts that block positive relation-building with some citizens.

2. *Pastors who grow up in metropolitan areas find themselves on a steep learning curve during their first experience in a small town.* Their effectiveness is as much determined by their ability to recognize and accomplish a genuine love of this community and its culture as by their ability to preach, teach, and care about their church members:

- After all, members of a small church in a small town feel as positive about the community as they do about one another.
- If their pastor (or the pastor's spouse) does not share that viewpoint, their pastor "does not seem to fit here."

Thus, the pastor must have a heart to serve, not just a small church, but a small church in a small community.

E. Talk and preach about positive change. Yes, the old adage—actions speak louder than words—applies to small church leadership. Thus, the essential emphasis on building relationships with parishioners noted above. Yet change-action *results* also derive from change-*thinking*, which usually happens because someone utters previously unheard words. Some word tips:

1. *Preach on forgiveness and letting go of the past.* Sometimes, antagonistic dynamics between two or more key parishioners block them and/or other congregants from (a) hearing the need for change or (b) accepting change proposals. Some people cannot forgive one another, no matter how often or strongly you preach it. However, most people in the congregation—no matter how bloody the turf wars of the past—can forgive and move beyond the past if they repeatedly hear that bugle call.

2. *Encourage people to recognize the need for change.* Perception of a need is the beginning of wisdom. Change only becomes possible following recognition by key lay leaders that continuing on the same course moves the congregation toward (a) ever-decreasing effectiveness and (b) the near-death results of an ever-declining membership. Such recognition must be more than the stern warning that "We must change or die!" New ideas must intertwine with pastoral love and concern to produce the hope that enables a congregation to look beyond its circumstances to its potential, *despite its circumstances*.

3. *Initially, a pastor works with one of the following circumstances regarding needed changes:* (a) only the pastor sees the need for a change; (b) only one or two laypersons see the need for a change; (c) only the pastor and one or two laypersons see the need for a change; (d) several congregants see the need for a change but feel that achieving the change is impossible due to limitations such as insufficient financial resources; or (e) several congregants see the need for a change but feel that achieving the change is impossible due to the active resistance of one or two strong-willed, over-controlling laypersons.

Each of those five circumstances is an equally formidable barrier to change. Removing that barrier requires time and careful social engineering.

4. *Whenever possible, ask leading questions that help people think of needed changes themselves.* People more often enthusiastically implement *their own ideas* than ideas about which they think someone else wants them to become enthusiastically excited.

5. *Figure out which laypersons can and cannot influence positive change.* Some people are negative change-influencers: their initial thinking about every proposed change is negative; they immediately articulate why something new will not work. Such people sometimes change their minds later, but they are not helpful during the early stages of thinking through new possibilities.

6. *Restrain people from negativity.* Show respect for people who say, “We tried that and it didn’t work!” But do not reinforce their statements. Example:

- When a governing board member expressed that opinion in response to a new idea, the pastor responded with, “Despite the fact that it didn’t work before, I think we should try it anyway. We’ve grown and changed since then. We have new people, and it may work now.”
- Often, such a statement of praise helps the majority to rally to the flag of a new idea and overrules the veto power of people who feel negative.

In some instances, after a negative person speaks in a group, say, “We could probably list several reasons why we should *not* consider this idea. You have stated one of them. If we were making a list of other reasons why we should *not* consider this idea, what would be on that list?”

- Encourage people to talk, without criticizing other peoples’ ideas, no matter how negative or far out they seem.
- That kind of open attitude by the pastor (a) causes negative people to feel you are willing to listen to them and (b) causes positive people in the group to begin developing support for the change possibility under discussion.

After the person or the group finishes that negative list, say, “Let’s see if we can think of any reasons why we *should* consider this idea. What might be some of the reasons for trying this idea that we could list?”

- Encourage people to talk.
- Let momentum build.
- Generally speaking, *never* call for a vote the first time such a group conversation occurs regarding a proposed change.

Allow change possibilities to simmer for a few weeks or months within the family system:

- This gives the change-resistant people time to get used to them and change their minds.
- This gives the change-affirming people time to build enthusiasm for the proposed change.

Timing is crucial in coaching people toward positive change. Effective pastors avoid saying what they think *too early* in the process—before change-momentum develops.

Before calling for a final vote or taking action, wait until people are feeling and asking, “When are we going to do that?”

7. *Whenever possible, give a layperson, group, or class the credit for a change-proposal.* The old adage that you can accomplish much more if you do not care who gets the credit applies ten-fold in small congregations. Small congregations usually want a new pastor *from the outside* but prefer new ideas *from the inside*.

8. *Wherever possible, turn people loose to use their gifts in accomplishing what they feel God calls them to do.* True to the Apostle Paul’s promise in the New Testament, God has gifted individuals in your congregation in special ways. Stay out of God’s way as God calls people to use those gifts in change-agent ways. In some cases, this means that the effective small-church pastor recognizes that he or she dare not launch a particular ministry that very much needs doing—until God calls a layperson to lead it.

F. Encourage the congregation to connect with the community. Connecting with Christ is imperative. Connecting with one another is essential. But connecting with the community determines whether the congregation’s future is bright or dark.

Community connections begin by some type of formal or informal assessment of the needs of people in that particular community.

Encourage the parishioners who have a God-given vision. Most great change-ideas start with a “what” but do not yet have the “how.” An effective small-church pastor does more than shepherd people in their hurts and life transitions; an effective small-church pastor shepherds the ideas God gives parishioners toward more effective congregational ministries. He or she helps visionary congregants see the “what” more clearly and helps them find the people who can help them with the “how.”

Example #1: One small-town pastor says, “Our congregation’s involvement in the community—more than any other single factor—has fueled our growth in ministries and membership:

- Since the school is the social center of the community in a small town, efforts to serve the school system, kids, and teachers have been especially fruitful.
- That makes my attendance at ballgames and band concerts a very important symbolic leadership role!

One way our congregation connects with the school system: we provide snacks for kids at testing times. Another way: our members volunteer to help with various school activities.”

Example #2: Another effective small-church pastor advises other pastors, “Get out of the church; become a working part of the community; mingle with the un-churched people.”

- Urging boldness with the Great Commission, the pastor invites everyone he meets to worship. “Have a heart for Jesus,” he says. “If you don’t, the un-churched people see through you and pay no attention to you or your congregation.”
- That pastor, serving in a village of fewer than 1,000 residents, (a) developed a “handyman ministry” that assists older people with various home fixit needs, (b) MCs the school’s sporting events, (c) leads a Wednesday after-school program for kindergarten through sixth grade from 3:15 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., and (d) organized a grades-seven-through-twelve youth ministry that meets for “serious stuff” on Tuesday evenings and “fun stuff” on Saturday evenings.

As with all such ministries, the need for them only became obvious *after* the pastor helped people develop them.

Example #3: Another small-town pastor, after much informal listening to un-churched people, identified a deep distrust of the organized church—due to several recent instances of internal congregational and cross-denominational conflicts. That pastor (a) instituted a less-structured worship service and (b) as a community service, worked with the neighboring Southern Baptist congregation to sponsor Rick Warren’s *Forty Days of Purpose* program, based on Warren’s best-selling book: *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing).

Example #4: Another congregation, in a larger community, mails 845 announcement-letters for special events three or four times each year.

Twice each year, the congregation invites the community to a FREE chili-feed or other type of meal. The result: fifty to seventy-five people attend; some of these people subsequently return for worship.

Chili Supper Announcement [sometimes the meal is stew and cornbread]:

Church Stationary with Name & Address

....To Our Friends and Neighbors....

It's time again for the **North Birdwell Lane United Methodist Church Annual Chili Supper**. We invite all the people of Howard County to join us for an evening of fun, food, and fellowship. We will serve chili, hot dogs, beans, salads, desserts, and all the trimmings—and *there is never a charge*. As always, we will hold a drawing for door prizes.

We will serve **Saturday, March 15** from 5:30 p.m. until 7:00 p.m. Make plans NOW to come and bring your family and friends.

We are located at 2702 North Birdwell, just before Birdwell Lane intersects North FM 700 near the Snyder Highway.

“OPEN HEARTS, OPEN MINDS, OPEN DOORS”

The North Birdwell Lane United Methodist Church

Throughout the year, that pastor and his parishioners also distribute small worship-invitation cards titled, “God loves you,” with a subtitle that says “and there is nothing you can do about it,” followed by “Please come visit us and experience the loving comfort only God can offer,” plus the worship and Sunday school times and the church name, address, and telephone number.

Example #5: Another congregation serving a micro-population town developed a multifaceted outreach ministry to the tiny public school:

- A group of church-member volunteers meets every Wednesday at the school and prays for each teacher by name.
- That school ministry group developed a weekly after-school program at the church, each Wednesday.
- The school ministry group developed a “Brown Bag Buddies” program, with confidential administrative linkage by a church member who works in the school office (with approval by the school principle).
 - Church members “adopt” specific children whose families are so needy that they cannot afford to purchase school pictures, etc.
 - The school employee matches donors with children with a numbering system; however, neither the donor nor the child knows where the money comes from or which child receives the financial help.
 - Thus, the program’s name: “Brown Bag Buddies.”
- Monthly, the church invites the high school kids to the church’s fellowship hall for a free “We’re Thankful for You Lunch.”

Example #6: Another congregation in a small town worked with the elementary school system to develop and provide volunteer staff for what amounted to an after-school latchkey program for working parents.

Example #7: The remnant of another congregation, previously a midsize church before a pastor absconded with one-half of the members to form a new congregation, started over with a genuine passion toward selfless care:

- A group of men in the congregation developed “His hands Ministry” to provide needy retirees with home repairs.
- Early in that experience, the ministry team gathered \$10,000 in donations and with volunteer labor built a small house for a needy widow. She was not a church member.
- Nor are most of the recipients of the “His Hands Ministry” efforts.

Selflessly giving assistance to people and the presence of a capable new pastor with a Kingdom focus, (a) helped that broken-spirited congregation find the road to healing from conflict and (b) began growing its worship attendance.

Example #8: A tiny congregation in a tiny town—through (a) the selfless contributions of skill and oversight from a second-career pastor formerly in construction work and (b) volunteers from the congregation—built a beautiful free-standing fellowship hall that serves as a community center.

The pastor says, “Ninety percent of the various community groups conduct meetings and hold events in our fellowship hall.”

G. Remember that community demographics do not determine a congregation's fate.

Research has repeatedly demonstrated that negative community circumstances are *highly overrated* as a barricade that blocks church health and effectiveness.

- Yes, a growing population base, especially if comprised predominantly of young adult families rather than retirees, creates the possibility of positive change in average worship attendance.
- Yet every growing community with numerous young adults contains several declining attendance congregations.
- And a few congregations in every declining-population community are experiencing worship attendance growth.

What factors exceed the importance of demographics for growing attendance in a congregation? One pastor says these two are primary:

- A pastor with “kingdom motivations,” not merely employment motivations
- A core group of laypersons that possess “kingdom motivations,” not merely tradition motivations

When one or both of those two factors is absent, positive change seldom happens.

Yes, pastors with kingdom motivations sometimes convert congregations to a kingdom viewpoint that creates the possibility of extroverted congregational behaviors.

- Sometimes, however, that does not happen!
- Some congregations have practiced their conflict habits and tradition-bronzed behaviors so long—or are ruled by a short list of highly skilled controlling personalities—that a kingdom motivated pastor has difficulty moving the congregation beyond its declining patterns.

On the other hand, congregations with a core group of kingdom motivated laypersons go no place with a non-kingdom motivated pastor. He or she, if armed with apathy, or negativity, or laziness, or control needs, or poor caring skills, or no encouragement habits, or the inability to organize and lead, can baptize the highest of lay leader aspirations in change-inhibiting molasses.

The central issue that predicts a congregation's future effectiveness is NEVER its community demographics! The central issue is whether the congregation has a pastor and people who allow God to use them in collecting on his Revelations 21:5 promise to “make all things new.”

Study/Discussion Session #3

Pastors. Prepare for this discussion session by making notes in the margins, especially with regard to the following questions.

1. Do you know of instances in which an insight in this paragraph or section seems to apply to a pastor or a congregation?
2. What would you like to add or subtract from this paragraph or section?
3. In what ways do you feel that an insight in this section or paragraph applies to you or the congregation you serve?

Discussion Leader. As you move through this discussion session, ask participants to take turns sharing their answers to the above questions.

A. Use initial weeks in the parish to set a change-receptive climate. God has surely called you to this church, not merely to maintain and manage respected traditions but to help create a positive future. That ministry begins with the attitude/expectation that the church's members will teach you important knowledge regarding this congregation's history, habits, and traditions:

- Avoid arriving with the attitude/expectation that you are here to impart wisdom to the natives.
- You know some ideas about ministry that these people do not know; but members of this congregation know many things about their church and community that you do not know. Listen carefully, with humility.
- Respecting these people on their turf is step one in developing a climate in which the Holy Spirit can speak through you and them to accomplish what neither of you could have done alone.
- As God incarnated Christ into first century culture to make a difference, achieving your ministry goal begins by allowing God to incarnate you into this congregation and this community to make a difference. The first step is "listen carefully."

However, in the desire to "get to know people and avoid making abrupt changes too soon," new pastors often miss significant opportunities that can develop a seedbed for positive changes in later months:

- Leadership experts commenting on the arrival of a new CEO or mid-level manager in the corporate workplace "have long noted the importance of a new leader's first three months on the job, when employees are most open to new direction." (H. James Wilson, "The Case for Collaborative Leadership," *Harvard Management Update*, October 2004)
- Newly arrived pastors, consumed with the details of getting settled in a new home, fitting into a new worship service, memorizing the names of parishioners, and finding out how we do things around here often miss golden opportunities that will not be available after the first year.

The following examples suggest two ways of capitalizing on golden opportunities during those early weeks in the congregation.

Example #1: One pastor of a tiny, formally dying congregation used the following procedure:

- He visited each home to demonstrate that someone cares about them personally and cares about their congregation.
- Subsequently, he began informal meetings with all the church families in small home groups of three or four families, taking care to involve the entire congregation.
- In those meetings, he began asking what this church wants to do. Does it want to keep going a few more years and eventually die? Does it want to stay small? Does it want to make a difference in people's lives in this community?

Next, the pastor visited *every family in that small village*.

- He asked the people in each household, "What would make the church exciting to others?"
- During these visits, the pastor met families with children who said that they "wanted the congregation to provide something for kids."
- This small church—because it was part of a yoke parish—had conducted Sunday worship at 8:30 a.m. for several years. The young families told the pastor that 8:30 a.m. was too early and noted the lack of Sunday school classes for their children.

Next, the pastor encouraged the congregation's governing board to provide more time options for worship attendance.

- The church established an additional worship service at 11:00 a.m. and a Sunday school hour prior to that service.
- Over the next three months worship attendance doubled and thirty children began attending Sunday school.
- During the next six years the congregation's membership grew from 30 to 171.

The pastor noted that this meteoric membership growth caused the painful loss a few families who wanted their church to stay small:

- They were less excited about Christ's Great Commission than about keeping everything the same.
- That is typically the case with major positive changes in a dying congregation. Many new people come and a few veteran members depart.

During the next few years, that pastor scheduled annual planning sessions to which he invited the entire congregation. At each annual meeting, the discussion focused on two questions:

- What can we do to help this church serve its community?
- How can we build a church fellowship that serves the entire community?

Example #2: Prior to his arrival in the parish, another pastor asked the governing board chairperson to appoint a welcoming committee. The new pastor requested that the chairperson of that committee help set up—within the first thirty days after his arrival—an opportunity to meet and eat with EVERY existing group in the congregation: choir, each adult Sunday school class, women's organization, etc.

The pastor found that even the INACTIVE members of those groups showed up at these "welcome the new pastor" meetings.

For parishioners NOT involved in one of those existing groups, the welcoming committee organized special "welcome the new pastor" get-togethers in groups of twelve to twenty parishioners.

The group meetings looked something like the following:

- When possible, the pastor's spouse attended these meetings, so parishioners could see the couple as a family unit. The pastor introduced himself and his spouse and shared some personal background. This provided an opportunity for the pastor and family to come across as "real" and to begin the lengthy process whereby parishioners adopted them into the church family.

- The pastor invited each person in the circle to share a bit of his/her background. He asked each attendee to give his/her name, an important fact about himself/herself, and how long he/she had been part of the congregation.
- The pastor then asked each person in the circle to answer the question, “If you were making a list of things that are happening in our church that are the most important to you, personally, what one, two, or three items would you put on that list?”
- After everyone had answered, the pastor asked people to go around the circle again and invited *everyone* to answer the question, “If you could wave a magic wand and change *only one thing* in our church, what would you change?”

In advance of each group meeting, the pastor had asked someone to serve as the group’s reporter, so that he could have a written record of these thoughts:

- The notes gave an instant picture of *what people valued the most* and *what they wished for*.
- Some of their dreams are off the wall.
- Other dreams were small, simple matters that could happen easily, quickly, and safely (with little or no conflict).

This was the pastor’s first step in both (a) building relationships and (b) gathering members’ ideas regarding what they would eagerly work together to accomplish. As a result of those meetings, the pastor gained two major advantages:

- The pastor had an accurate lay of the land that would ordinarily have taken two to three years to obtain.
- The pastor could quickly make a few small changes that were possible without conflict and build a reputation as “someone who we can trust to get things done!”

After completing his meetings with the various groups, the new pastor invited all members to attend a Sunday night dinner meeting to discuss the future. During that large group meeting, the pastor hung sheets of butcher paper on the walls to create two large timelines. He used the following procedure:

1. The first timeline was world history back to 1776; the pastor asked people to volunteer some of the major happenings, such as the Civil War and World War II, and wrote them on the timeline.
2. The second timeline was a history of the congregation back to its beginning; he asked people to volunteer some of the dates of major happenings, and wrote them on the timeline.
3. Then, the pastor asked people to come up and write on the timeline their names and the year they became members of the congregation (if they grew up in the church, the year they were baptized or confirmed). People enjoyed the participation opportunity.
4. At any points on the timeline where numerous names clustered during a particular year or years, the pastor said, “Several of you became part of the congregation during these years. What was going on in the congregation at that time?” This gave the pastor and the members—especially people who had joined during recent years—a picture of the church’s history.
5. To conclude the evening, the pastor said, “We see what has happened in our past. What will our church’s tomorrow look like?”
 - Most people responded that they did not know.
 - The pastor said, “As individuals, most of us have plans for what we want to accomplish during the next few years. Should we make some plans about what we feel God wants our church to accomplish during the next few years?”
 - Their response was, or course, affirmative.

What is the next step? Helping a small church to achieve a new tomorrow involves (1) devising and implementing concrete action ideas while (2) finding ways to persuasively deal with that short list of lay leaders who usually set up formidable roadblocks to every suggested change.

This step involves helping people use a *process* of some type that does the following:

1. Accomplishes change
2. Minimizes conflict
3. Deals with roadblock builders in a caring way

Working the details of such a *process* communicates the reasons for the change while living out this principle: everyone has input, but that does not mean they have control.

Launching an effective congregational change process usually takes several months. The implementation stage continues for three to five years. During this time the pastor, the lay leaders, and the congregation as a whole arrive at a comprehensive vision and the action steps that emerge at the intersection of (1) *the congregation's historic identity* (who we think we are in our denomination and community), (2) *the congregation's internal values* (what types of ministry we have historically believed in and view as nonnegotiable values), and (3) *the congregation's external community context* (the population composition and demographic trends in our area). (Lovett H. Weems, Jr. [Nashville: Abingdon Press], pp 107-108)

This congregational change vision is never fully formed in its initial stages. This change vision is not an *event*; it is a *process*. It is *never* something a pastor hands people; it is *always* something the *process* helps people discern and perfect over time.

Such a vision-discovering process typically happens in one of two ways: through a *formal* process or through an *informal* process.

B. Roadmap for an Informal Change-Process: Pastors who prefer an *informal* process find the following principles and methods of value:

1. *Reinforce and/or repair the congregation's spiritual focus*, which in the minds of many parishioners has been subtly displaced by a focus on keeping the bills paid, the building repaired, and the doors open.

- As one effective pastor put it, “We replaced the philosophy of getting people to go to church with the philosophy of getting people to be the church.”
- Pray for God to touch this congregation, recognizing that willingness to pray about the future is an essential component of a positive church future. See the appendix for (a) example of a prayer web process that overcomes a major deficiency in the classic prayer-chain structure found in many churches, (b) a process titled *The Secret to Abundant Living: Learning How to Ask*, which has enlarged the number of people engaged in daily prayer in many congregations across the United States, and (c) prayers that pastors have found helpful.
- Value and promote personal and group Bible study, biblically based preaching, and helping people to develop their spiritual gifts for ministry.
- Preach Grace: not every new idea we try will work; some will and some will not; failure at one thing neither predicts failure at everything nor indicates that we should not try new things.

2. *Build a strong sense of family and fellowship among the congregation's members.* People in any small church that does not feel like family will have difficulty acting like a family when they consider the future. Principles and procedures:

- This is even more important if the congregation has experienced (a) repetitive conflict over the years, comprised of warring factions that vie for control, (b) recent

heated conflict, such as one church experienced when a community school board fight bled into a small-town congregation, or (c) conflict between the last pastor and several church members, which left unhealed feelings and resentments among some members. Action possibility:

- If one of the three circumstances described above exists, consider using *Church Effectiveness Nuggets Volume 3, How to Prevent and Resolve Congregational Conflict*.
- Using this tool as a three-session, study-discussion process for the first thirty minutes of each monthly governing board meeting can move the church's leaders from a purely reactionary role of putting out fires to a more proactive role of fire prevention." (Download free at the www.TheParishPaper.com Web site.)
- Recognition and appreciation are a foundation on which people grow increasingly comfortable with new ideas and changes. Demonstrate genuine appreciation for each congregant, initially and continuously.
 - One pastor says he kept telling the congregation that they did not know how good they really were; after re-running that mantra for several years, the people "got it" and were accomplishing many ministries that they had never expected to do.
 - Another pastor, during the early months of her tenure—after researching the special contribution each congregant had been making to congregational life—conducted a laity banquet during which she ceremoniously handed each individual a personalized certificate of appreciation. One parishioner responded, "Nobody's ever honored me before!" That pastor continues to honor people with recognitions such as birthdates, charter member status, this year's new members, and installation of church officers during worship.

3. *If Sunday school classes for preschool through sixth-grade children do not exist or have micro-attendance, put energy into restarting or enlarging them.* Only under rare circumstances (resort-retirement communities with zero children) do churches without children in Sunday school have (a) a long-term future and (b) significant morale to consider other new ideas.

Principles and procedures:

- Statistical improvements in elementary Sunday school participation help people move beyond despair to the type of hope that makes consideration of other changes a possibility, such as establishment of a youth group.
- To reinvent or strengthen elementary Sunday school attendance, see the seven-month strategy titled "Reinventing the Sunday School in Childless Churches" in *Church Effectiveness Nuggets Volume 14, 25 Turnaround Strategies for Small Congregations* (download free at www.TheParishPaper.com).
- If and when the congregation contains any high school youth, give those youth frequent and visible leadership opportunities, such as the scripture reading during worship *every* Sunday.
 - One small congregation had only three high school youth when the pastor arrived.
 - Through the pastor's encouragement and the skills of new youth sponsors (a couple in their mid-forties), that small nucleus gradually grew to twenty-five youth who met on Wednesday nights and Sunday morning.
 - Each week, the pastor involved youth in the worship service.

- Every three months, the pastor gave the youth complete responsibility for planning and leading the worship service.
- The visibility of youth connects older church members' with their sense of responsibility for the future and increases the ease with which they accept new ideas in worship and other areas of ministry.
- Small congregations with sufficient numbers of junior high and/or senior high youth may find of value the several principles and procedures in *Church Effectiveness Nuggets, Volume 2, How to Grow Strong Youth Groups* (download free of charge at www.TheParishPaper.com).

4. Remember that a change in identity, philosophy, and attitude is often essential to revitalizing a small church. Disconnect efforts to improve congregational self-identity from any overt or veiled tendencies to correlate effectiveness with membership size. Help the congregation to feel “significant” despite its small size in comparison to giant-church neighbors. Encourage people to feel that it is okay to be an *effective* small church. Principles and procedures:

a. Small-church effectiveness accompanies an attitude shift that must include, and sometimes begins with, regional denominational officials such as district superintendents. Research indicates that part-time or bi-vocational pastors sometimes provide small-church leadership equal to or better than full-time pastors: moving beyond the attitude of “we need to fill this vacancy” and arriving at that operational perception is the beginning of wisdom for some denominational executives. A positive attitude regarding small churches among denominational leaders, along with consistent affirmation of and emotional support for small-church pastors of every stripe is an essential element in strengthening effectiveness in small congregations.

b. Small-church effectiveness often begins when members' attitudes start shifting beyond “we can't do anything of value because we are small.” Often, parishioners have unknowingly hypnotized themselves into lethargy, because several years of decline in attendance and financial strength have built a strong, negative self-image. Reversing that self-hypnosis is a gradual, effortful leadership procedure. Parishioner attitude change is a process, NOT an event! Parishioner attitude transfusions seldom result from a new program, but more often from new visions and new actions that emerge from the interaction between a new leader, church members, and local community needs.

Examples:

- Some parishioners can change their negative attitudes when a new leader helps them see a new vision.
- Some parishioners can change their negative attitudes when a new pastor introduces a stewardship program that moves congregants away from a bill-paying mentality and toward giving a higher percentage of their income to accomplish the Lord's work through their congregation.
- A large percentage of small-church attendees do not change their negative attitudes about their congregation until they become personally involved in productive ministries.
- Another large group of parishioners cannot change their negative attitudes until they SEE the results of new congregational directions.
- In some small congregations, parishioners have reinforced a negative self-identity by looking at their church's membership totals and feeling defeated because worship attendance is so low. One pastor in a declining-population small-town helped parishioners to see reality more clearly by reporting non-

resident and resident members. This helped the members see that their congregation's weekly worship attendance included more than one-half of their LOCAL members—a statistic that leaders in most large, mainline, metropolitan churches would kill to achieve. The pastor began saying, “Isn't it wonderful that such a high percentage of our church family gathers for worship each week! This NEVER happens in the larger churches of our denomination!”

c. Small-church effectiveness begins happening when the pastor engineers ways to involve more people in ministry efforts than the short list of “committed but weary” lay leaders who “always do everything.”

- Generally speaking, the congregation's newest members are the most receptive to using their gifts in lay ministries.
- However, the lay ministry enthusiasm of some long-term members increases when they begin seeing positive results from new ideas and begin discovering the joy of making a difference in peoples' lives.
- Typically, additional involvement requires new ministries; not merely recruiting new people to help do the same old functions. In other words, most people energetically take hold ONLY when a new vision makes new ministry roles available—roles that energize people because they want to and feel called to personally make a difference in those endeavors.

d. Small-church effectiveness begins happening when members begin (1) looking outside the walls toward ministry possibilities—rather than inside the walls at maintaining the institution—and (2) involving themselves in hands-on helping ministries that make a difference in the lives of hurting people.

A spiritual focus on motivation and training for Christian discipleship (1) enables people to begin thinking beyond the paralyzing emotional straitjacket of “we are slowly dying and nothing can change that” and (2) makes possible the examination and implementation of new ideas by the constituency. Examples:

- A bi-vocational pastor in one small congregation moved people in that direction by establishing a lay academy on Wednesday nights. The schedule encompassed about ten weeks each fall and about thirteen weeks each spring. The choir practiced at 5:30 p.m., followed by a fellowship meal at 6:30 p.m., followed by brief worship at 7:15 p.m., followed by Bible study in three to four small groups—using a variety of resources such as *Disciple I*, *Disciple II*, and *Disciple III*. This Lay Academy is the centerpiece from which (1) new attendees become assimilated into the church family as they develop relationships and (2) both members and newcomers grow toward more active discipleship behaviors.
- Another pastor increased the number of people actively involved in ministries by (1) fine-tuning the cumbersome denominational committee list into four groups, (2) calling them “ministry teams,” (3) using the material in the “Lay Mobilization through Passion Identification” material in the appendix on Sunday morning and in mail-outs to help individuals identify their “passion for ministry,” and (4) placing people into four ministry teams: education, worship, outreach, and mission.
- Another pastor and small-town congregation significantly increased the number of people actively involved by establishing a LOGOS Program for children and youth (for information on this program, go to the www.logos-system.org Web site. The congregation, with an average worship attendance of about sixty, (1) paid for the training, despite the fact that the church had no funds for this effort;

(2) involved thirty-five adults in ministry that first year (fifty adults the second year), many of whom had previously done nothing because they were not inspired and did not feel needed; (3) engaged thirty-five children and youth in the program the first year (seventy kids the second year); (4) reinvented that small church's ministry to and visibility in that small community; and (5) involved non-churched kids, a few of which were from five other congregations' families, and several helpers from congregations in four other denominations. As the LOGOS Program grew in reputation and attraction-power across four years, the congregation's average worship attendance gradually rose from 60, to 80, to 90, to 160.

e. Small-church effectiveness begins when members begin experiencing the joy of making a difference in the lives of people outside the congregation. Those experiences often begin a chain-reaction in which, over a period of one or two years, (1) the church's corporate self-esteem improves; (2) the church members are even more energized for reaching out; (3) the members are less inclined toward the feelings of hopelessness that reinforce a keeping-the-doors-open, maintenance mentality; (4) the un-churched people in the surrounding community become aware of the congregation's significance; (5) the internal enthusiasm among members generates a more magnetic attraction to outsiders; and (f) attendance growth can begin replacing attendance decline.

f. Small-church effectiveness begins to happen when attitudes shift away from "we must prevent the church from closing" and toward "we will warmly welcome new people."

- Welcoming does NOT mean pressing them to become members; welcoming means warmly adopting them into the family.
- Relationships are the primary power in small congregations. Most of the people who feel attracted to small churches are (1) looking for the positive relationships absent in their family of origin or (2) looking for the positive relationships they enjoyed in their family of origin.
- Building stronger relationship bonds among members and between members and newcomers tends to produce the higher worship attendance and membership statistics that setting membership-growth goals seldom achieve.
- Paradoxically, God almost never blesses a small church with membership growth when it begins by setting a membership-growth goal. Membership growth becomes possible when a small church's members say to themselves that it is okay to be a small church but it is *not* okay to be an *ineffective* small church.

5. *A strong vision for the future is seldom evident in small congregations.* Thus, the congregation needs a pastor who has a vision. Even more important, the congregation needs a pastor capable of helping them find a vision. If you cannot see the future, you have no way of going there. Finding and shaping a congregational vision is never an *event* that happens by pastoral proclamation on a specific date at a specific meeting. Rather, vision is a *process* that includes the following steps:

a. Early in pastoral tenure, find tools that shepherd people toward surfacing and acting on their own dreams. An excellent resource that helps pastors see how to facilitate that process is *Take the Next Step: Leading Lasting Change in the Church* by Lovett H. Weems, Jr. (Nashville: Abingdon Press).

b. Involve as many people as possible in an informal process of discussing, dreaming, idea-contributing, and brainstorming possibilities for the future. This involvement process increases peoples' understanding of WHY a change is needed and increases the number of people who feel motivated to help accomplish a new mission or ministry once the congregation chooses a direction. However, the involvement of numerous individuals is NOT just to produce "ownership," reduce resistance to change, and increase motivation. Different people bring different perspectives to every new idea. Their input adds value to shaping a new vision and an implementation strategy.

c. During vision-incubation, keep listening to leaders, communicating, and signaling the importance of openness to new ideas and willingness to modify the development of new ministries and methods based on experience and observation.

- While congregants in small churches view their pastor as a caring, preaching, and teaching resource, few of them view the pastor as an idea resource. More often, they see him or her as an outside leader who is here to help us do better what we are already doing. They view him more as an assistant to their dream-fulfillment than as a dream creator.
- Plant idea-seeds and let them grow over a period of several months, one year, and sometimes several years.
- Do not expect all of the new seed-thoughts to bear fruit, but the habit of planting new ideas (without being obsessively married to them), models and teaches the value of thinking before acting.
- This often means keeping some great ideas to one's self until the timing is right.

d. Collect ideas from outside the congregation, such as from other clergy and congregations, books, seminars, and drinking coffee with un-churched people in the community.

e. Avoid over-programming the congregation with ideas imported from a previous pastorate or other "model" congregations and teaching churches. Love, listen, and learn this congregation's unique history and "story" BEFORE establishing new ministries and programs. Attempting to build this congregation's future with the successful ingredients from a previous pastorate, or from some successful congregation in a distant city, often feels highly motivational to the pastor but silly to the parishioners. The biblical goals of every congregation are identical, regardless of its past history; but the methods for achieving those goals must "fit" (make sense to the members) of this congregation.

f. Avoid a pastoral-control mentality regarding congregational ministry activities. That leadership style has three principle results: (1) a very *short* list of parishioners who like to be told what to do are active in getting things done, (2) a *long* list of parishioners retreat to the bleachers to watch the pastor work harder and harder, (3) a short list of parishioners whose control needs equal that of the pastor engage in conflict with the pastor and with the people who prefer that the pastor tell them what to do, and (4) none of the parishioners generate much creativity in their various ministry roles, since at best the pastor does not reward new ideas and at worst punishes ingenuity with public disapproval.

g. The pastor does not arrive with a clean-slate brain, totally devoid of change ideas, but the pastor must avoid arriving with, and the *appearance* of arriving with, a big box of his or her visions. Every congregation has established patterns. Since the members have

strong convictions about what is possible and not possible in their church, the pastor must begin by discovering those understandings and the history behind them. The congregation's vision can include the pastor's vision but MUST also include God's vision and the parishioners' vision as they see God's vision.

- Exhibit enthusiasm for the vision and mission that emerges from the listening, brainstorming, and dreaming process. Seeing that the pastor is passionate about God's work in this congregation and this community lights the fires of enthusiasm and motivation in church members.
- Work *alongside* the laypeople. Do not try to do and be the church for the congregation! But do not expect the congregation to do the Lord's work without pastoral participation. Become part of the team, not merely the team's commanding general or the team's observer.
- In the vision-incubation process, the pastor is more than merely a blank slate on which parishioners write their dreams. But the pastor, if she or he brings a new idea to the table must carefully and tentatively bring it forward, so as not to come across as the outside guru who is here to deliver us from our ignorant state. He or she presents ideas in conversation with members and leaders, not as the expert from afar but as a family member who asks, "How do you think this idea would work here?"

h. Let laypersons come to a feeling of need and encourage them in their ministries, while avoiding the ego-rewarding urge to (1) come up with all the new ideas and (2) closely supervise all ministry activities. For example, a small congregation in a small town began developing an interest in ministry with youth when someone suggested a street dance for the kids. More than 100 kids showed up, the congregation attained considerable community visibility, almost 100 percent of members helped to provide refreshments, and parishioners began talking about other possibilities for ministry with youth.

i. Project to parishioners the attitude that "I will not personally make the decision whether to change something or leave it the same, but I will insist that you discuss ideas and make decisions."

j. Toward the end of the congregation's vision-incubation stage, as a vision for the future begins emerging from the mists of discussion and coming into focus, the pastor adds a new ingredient to the process: he or she begins communicating that vision *with passion*.

- Rational thinking is important in developing and refining new ideas.
- But as every coach knows, few winning teams develop on logic alone. Eventually, someone with passion begins to lead the group in that direction.
- There is a time for strategizing plays; there is a time for action. Energetic action requires the emotional fuel of passion from the coach. As someone said, "Pace of the leader, pace of the team." Congregations seldom develop genuine passion for a new ministry or mission without passion from their pastor.

k. In addition to a few influential laypersons, a pastor with change-agent aspirations usually needs some how-to-do-it idea-leverage from outside himself or herself.

- That leverage moves the grapevine conversations beyond "what the new pastor wants" to "ideas that make sense to us" and thereby increases internal congregational motivation.

- Often, the most effective outside-idea leverage comes from a source *other than* the regional or national denominational structure: many small church leaders have a love-hate relationship with denominational entities, suspecting that they have little to offer—other than requests from greater missions and benevolences donations.
- Whenever feasible, schedule *local* seminars and resources on topics related to changes needed.

l. In some micro-congregations where two or three people have controlled all decisions—which sometimes means that they block all changes—reconstituting a simple committee system that includes Worship, Stewardship, Outreach, and Education can help to give the decisions for making changes back to the congregation. This allows the pastor to defend against arbitrary ideas and actions from some over-controlling people by saying, “Let’s put that on the agenda for the next meeting of the _____ Committee.”

m. Make changes gradually and avoid making several changes at the same time. Often, the law of unintended consequences means a decision must be reconsidered after testing it. Making several changes at the same time can make evaluation quite complex: the question of “Which change caused this negative result?” becomes impossible to answer.

n. Discuss any major idea or change-proposal at several governing board meetings before taking a vote on it. Before making the decision, communicate its possibilities to the entire congregation. Do not surprise people! Changes create reactions; changes that take people totally by surprise cause much LARGER change-reactions. Taking time to engage the entire congregation in thinking about ideas and possible changes reduces the time spent in remedial conflict management.

- o. Encourage older leaders to encourage younger adults to assume leadership roles.
 - At every opportunity, remind seasoned leaders of their responsibility for mentoring the next generation of congregational leaders.
 - Remind older leaders that taking care of a church responsibility ourselves may actually be easier (less time-consuming), but helping younger leaders to learn how to handle that responsibility is an even higher calling than merely getting the job done.
 - People who encourage and train others often become more flexible regarding shifts in “how we’ve always done it” and learn new ideas they would never have encountered by continuing to do something themselves.

6. *Recognize that the classic committee structure so useful in midsize and large congregations fails to take into account the small-group nature of decision-making in small churches.* Examples of how to address that matter:

- a. One pastor schedules “Chit Chats” six times each year, immediately following the worship service. Anyone who “has an issue” they want to discuss is asked bring it up.
 - This climate allows pro and con conversations about ministry plans, without the pressure of voting.
 - This climate allows everyone to have their say; thus, showing respect for their opinions without giving them control of the outcome.

- This climate gives some people time to change their minds from negative to positive, before the matter comes to a vote at a governing board meeting.
- Letting people talk about something reduces the tendency for destructive conflict to blight the bloom of a great idea when leaders begin to implement the change.
- As well as giving negative people time to soften their view, this process allows some of the more positive people time to understand that their dream may not fit this size congregation in this community at this point in its history.
- Many new members bring a vision from previous congregational experiences. Thus, some people who move from large congregations may need time to adjust their sights to what fits here instead of what they have experienced elsewhere.

b. Another pastor conducts a monthly “Discovery Night” on Sunday evening that uses a similar approach as that described above:

- The meeting is open to all members; no one is coerced to attend but no one is restricted from attending.
- The meeting is not mandatory for board members, and the meeting invitation includes people who are not yet official members.
- The “Discovery Night” recommendations go to the church board.

This adroit process (1) recognizes the authority of the church board, (2) grounds brainstorming in the entire congregation, (3) lets new ideas emerge and gain traction in the congregation as a whole, and (4) disrobes the veto power of the church board’s resident naysayers without painful confrontation that can lead to civil war.

c. In another congregation, worship was the only significant activity when the pastor arrived. Supply preachers on Sunday morning had been the sole form of clergy leadership for several years. Consequently, the worship committee was the only regularly meeting lay leadership group.

- Since congregants respected the long-established authority of the worship committee as a planning group, the pastor began meeting regularly with the committee.
- The pastor and the worship committee gradually became an informal congregational planning team.
- Along with changes in the worship service, the committee created fifth Sunday events and minted other special day activities.
- The worship committee became the pastor’s sounding board to discuss new ideas, evaluate tentative changes, and lead the congregation into new territory.

Why did such an untraditional approach to coaching congregational change work so well? The pastor built on the foundation of that congregation’s experiences and the influential role of an established lay leadership group.

d. As another pastor begins his ministry with a congregation, he prays for God to help him find several people who want their church to move toward positive changes. During the early months of his tenure, the pastor begins identifying, through informal conversations, individuals who seem inclined in this direction. Eventually, he invites these people to an informal group meeting. With questions such as “Here’s what I see as possible; what do you see as possible?” the pastor helps people sort through options. The process unfolds as follows:

- The group meets occasionally (not on any regular basis) over a period of several months. During that time, the group’s members develop a sharper vision of the

change or changes they believe should happen and a stronger passion to see them happen.

- These individuals naturally begin to share their ideas with others in their circles of influence within the congregation. Whether the change possibility relates to worship style, mission, or whatever, additional people may begin attending these informal meetings as others feel inspired or called to take part in the new idea.
- Eventually, the idea permeates the church's participation and leadership core. At this point, when the group is ready to take action—or ready to recommend the change to the church's governing board—the group meetings cease.
- Thus, the informal group takes care not to usurp the authority of the congregation's governing board, as that would create counterproductive stresses and conflicts. Rather, the group is an informal think tank.

The pastor says that many people in small churches have developed and hardened a tendency toward pessimistic thinking. Therefore, positive change must begin by encouraging them to move beyond that pattern.

To reinforce the informal think-tank process outlined above, he continuously emphasizes a “Dare to Believe” theme with the entire congregation.

Thus, the pastor repeatedly encourages people to think about the future based on a “dare to believe in our congregation” conviction.

e. A pastor who has a terrific track record of positive change in his service with two successive congregations said that he felt the changes occurred primarily through four procedures:

- *Pray for God to send two or three men with whom he could pray and talk.* In both of those growing congregations, that happened; and the pastor began meeting with those three men for one and one-half hours each week. Eventually, the pastor's prayer group established a goal of “every man in the church in a prayer group.”
- *Get men actively involved and do not focus on women.* The pastor sent out cards to every man in the church, appointing them to a prayer group and appointing a leader for each prayer group. Not every man responded to this invitation, but many did. In his present church, three men's prayer groups formed, involving thirty men. The pastor does not meet with those three men's prayer groups; he meets only with his own initial group.
 - ✓ The pastor cites as a helpful resource for this model John Maxwell's *Partners in Prayer* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996). Each of the men's prayer groups reads one chapter of this book per week.
 - ✓ The pastor says, “When these groups started meeting, God blessed the congregation in numerous ways, including increased attendance, giving, and discipleship.”
- *Emphasize and teach a scriptural base for the church.* The pastor teaches a Sunday evening Bible study group, starting with the book of Acts. In his present congregation, that Sunday evening group's attendance averages fifty people.
- *Aggressively advertise in the community.* In his previous church, the pastor placed fliers on windshields at several major parking lots each Monday, including Alco, Wal-Mart, and grocery stores. Since the pastor conducted a cowboy ministry on Thursday nights, he also placed flyers at the feed yards. Word of mouth began to multiply as a result of those windshield fliers.

7. *Attempt to achieve a BIG Sunday attendance once or twice a year.* Double the typical Sunday worship attendance classifies as BIG. Parishioners have long memories regarding bad congregational experiences. However, occasional highly positive experiences tend to (1) blur those negative memories, (2) build positive congregational self-image, (3) give people increasing confidence that “we can do things that work,” and (4) build greater openness toward considering new ideas.

8. *Organize several special days and events each year.* When adult classes are small and few, special events, geared to the congregation’s size, (a) create fellowship opportunities for members, (b) reinforce the feeling of family not otherwise available to those adults who are not in a Sunday school class, (c) give newer attendees bonding opportunities, and (d) draw a few new people toward the family. Warning:

- Avoid the ever-present temptation to make every successful special day or event the “First Annual Whatever.”
- Some special events, such as a Christmas season celebration, continue to draw positive response forever.
- Other special events wear thin as a few people feel obligated to produce them, a few loyalists feel guilty if they fail to attend, and most people stay home.
- Consider developing two NEW events or special days each year that are NOT repeated in future years.

9. *Increasing lay involvement in planning and leading worship tends to increase the congregants’ receptivity to variety in worship content and style.* That increased creativity may (a) combat mind-numbing boredom and (b) spiritually connect with more young adult parents and youth.

- One pastor started a lay ministries training program that includes worship leadership. That pastor says this training takes more time and is more difficult than “doing all of the worship leadership myself,” but the benefits more than compensate for the hazards.
- That same pastor says that while the congregation does not have a choir, it makes frequent use of trios, quartets, and ensembles—from adults and youth from both inside the church and in the community. These special music presentations in worship—as well as adding meaning to the worship experience—also model for and familiarize people with new choruses and hymns that the congregation may sing as worship hymns in subsequent months.

10. *Over several depressing years a maintenance mentality (keep the doors open so we can hold funeral services for the members and the roof from leaking so the shrinking crowd will stay dry) tends to generate inadequate finances.* Fewer and fewer people feel inspired to fund that kind of goal. People want their contributions to make a difference. Keeping a dying institution on life-support for a few more years inspires sparse donations.

a. In a few instances, ensuring adequate finances may involve concrete steps to “fix” a consistently defective annual budget.

- One new-church start plateaued into a permanently small congregation when it constructed the first building in 1992 and began making monthly debt payments that it could not possibly meet.
- No amount of “You’re OK” cheerleading by the new pastor could have reversed that congregation’s sense of doom and gloom—had the congregation not refinanced its mortgage into rational monthly payments.

b. Financial support increased when one small congregation began (1) paying its Apportionments in full (an Episcopal Church and United Methodist term that means “our fair share of denominational mission-causes support, based on our size”) and (2) giving 10 percent of its monthly offerings to help hurting people in the community.

The governing board wisely appointed a five-person force to make decisions regarding dispersals from that “Good Neighbor Fund.”

Generally speaking, the more a small church focuses on special offerings for special causes that visibly help local needy people or visibly meet needs of people in other communities or countries, the more people feel positive about generously supporting denominational causes.

c. Another small church schedules a fifth Sunday offering that can go to local, national, or international causes. Example: Florida hurricane relief, Africa University, and specific local community needs. A mission committee recommends the specific cause to which the church gives each of these four annual offerings.

The congregation also has a Joy Jar into which people put special offerings on birthdays and anniversaries. A Caring Hands Committee makes decisions for the use of that money to help local needy people.

d. The leaders in some congregations feel depressed because their giving to denominational mission causes has been poor for many years. This is especially true of congregations that support their denomination’s various mission-causes with Apportionments (an Episcopal Church and United Methodist term that means “our fair share of denominational mission-causes support, based on our size”). One congregation reversed a decades-old Apportionments-failure pattern in the following way:

- Someone constructed a six-foot-tall, hollow, wooden cross that stands in a prominent place near the pulpit in the front of the church’s sanctuary.
- In the center of the cross is a hole that contains dozens of tubes of M&M’s® Milk Chocolate Candies.
- At the beginning of each year, the pastor introduces the process by saying something like the following:
 - “Come up and take a tube of M&M’s. They are free, just as God’s Grace is free to each of us.
 - “When you’ve eaten the M&M’s, keep the tube. It will hold fourteen quarters. When you have collected enough quarters to fill the tube, bring it up and place it in one of the slots in the lower part of the cross.
 - “If each of our members takes four tubes of M&M’s during the course of this year and fills them with quarters, our church will pay 100 percent of its Apportionments—something we have not been about to do for many, many years.”
- On one arm of the cross is a small card that reads “One” when sufficient tubes of quarters come in to pay one-fourth of the Missions Apportionments.
- When sufficient tubes come in to pay one-half the Missions Apportionments, the small card reads “Two.”
- Through this procedure, members of the congregation dare to believe they can do what they have not done before. Year after year, God rewards their belief with positive results.

e. Help the small church overcome its feeling of being an isolated island by tying in with other, larger churches for mission trips, etc. Encourage people to shift their attitude from “We have to do everything alone, and we are too small to do much!” to thinking, “We can cooperate with a neighboring congregation of our denomination to take mission actions we cannot do alone.”

f. In 95 percent of mainline congregation, adequate finances for mission and ministries happen *only* through an effective annual stewardship campaign. Options that fit a small congregation include *Grow One Sunday* (Download by clicking on “Digital Store” at www.cokesbury.com) or *New Consecration Sunday, 2007 Revised Edition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press), available from Cokesbury www.cokesbury.com or 800/672-1789, which is used in both small and large congregations throughout the United States.

Adequate finances generated through an effective annual stewardship campaign that focuses on the principle of the need of the giver to give for his or her spiritual benefit, rather than on the need of the church to receive to pay its bills benefits a small church by (1) eliminating financial stress overnight and (2) creating instant positive atmosphere and attitudes.

C. Formal Change-Process Options: The pastor and governing board can pick from a wide variety of *formal* tools and planning processes to engage leaders in respecting the past and present while planning for the future:

- Some churches may want to invite an outside consultant.
- Other churches may want to engage their leaders in the study of a book such as Rick Warren’s *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1995).
- Still other churches may want to use the *How to Accomplish Effective Congregational Planning* process; download free at the www.TheParishPaper.com Web site.
- Still other churches may want to use *Church Effectiveness Nuggets, Volume 14, 25 Turnaround Strategies for Small-Membership Congregations* (download free of charge at www.TheParishPaper.com).

Each of these Formal Change-Process Options uses the same general principles as those outlined in “Study/Discussion Session #1” above and in “Section B. Roadmap for an Informal Change Process” above. However, a formal-change paradigm unpacks those informal principles and procedures in a systematic, step-by-step pattern.

Study/Discussion Session #4

Pastors. Prepare for this discussion session by making notes in the margins, especially with regard to the following questions.

1. Do you know of instances in which an insight in this paragraph or section seems to apply to a pastor or a congregation?
2. What would you like to add or subtract from this paragraph or section?
3. In what ways do you feel that an insight in this section or paragraph applies to you or the congregation you serve?

Discussion Leader. As you move through this discussion session, ask participants to take turns sharing their answers to the above questions.

A. Bi-vocational clergy must operate differently than full-time clergy. Time pressures are different; thus, the pastor must become extremely skilled in managing that nonrenewable energy source. Then, too, attending most denominational events for clergy is impossible, as most of them are schedule on weekdays.

Bi-vocational clergy must guard against buying into the much believed, but often inaccurate, myth that part-time clergy are always less effective than full-time clergy. With some congregations, just the opposite is true:

- Because the pastor is part time, (1) he or she is not tempted to become the congregation's hired help to do the church's ministry for them and (2) fewer of the members tend to delegate that role to him or her.
- Some congregations, especially those in a yoke-parish in which one pastor serves two churches, found that new life began with the service of a highly motivated, part-time, bi-vocational pastor.

Some bi-vocational pastors bring time management skills learned in their other vocation to their church role. Other pastors learn valuable time management skills from secular books and from sources such as *Church Effectiveness Nuggets, Volume 10, How to Increase Your Time-Management Skills* (download free at www.TheParishPaper.com).

B. Seminary education is insufficient to produce effective small-church pastors. Roger Finke, professor of sociology and religious studies at Pennsylvania State University, writes that "relatively untrained clergy continue to be far more effective in bringing people into the church than those trained in seminaries." (Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press)

Historical and contemporary studies indicate the following reasons why non-seminary trained clergy are often more effective than their seminary trained colleagues:

- They communicate greater enthusiastic for the gospel message.
- They understand their congregations better.
- They are more responsive to the needs of people they try to reach.
- They are usually more innovative. Why? Seminary-trained clergy usually turn to a network of professional clergy for ideas. Non-seminary trained clergy rely on another network: "people in the community, businesspeople they work with, and newly converted people. As a result, they constantly introduce more creative, experimental, and effective models." (Roger Fink and Kevin Daugherty, "The Effects of Professional Training," *Journal for Scientific Study of Religion* 41 (2002): 103-120.)

- They are more involved in daily Bible reading and devote more hours to prayer.

Note: A few seminaries emphasize spiritual and biblical formation along with education in the formal theological disciplines. Thus, some of their students retain a spiritual fervor similar to clergy with no seminary training. (See the list Bob Whitesel provides in *Growth by Accident, Death by Planning* (Nashville: Abingdon Press.)

This research data does not mean that aspiring clergy should not attend seminary; rather, it means that a seminary education is only one facet in the complex diamond of small-church clergy competence.

C. What are the most rewarding feelings in small-church ministry? The several dozen highly effective small-church pastors interviewed in this study responded to that question with comments that fit into three categories.

1. Personal Satisfaction:

- Immediate and positive reception by the congregation on arrival as the new pastor
- Being trusted, affirmed, and appreciated—both as a person and in the pulpit
- The congregation’s willingness to let me be who I am—accomplishing some things and not other things
- The congregation’s generosity and benevolence to their pastor
- Involvement in peoples’ lives
- The satisfaction of helping kids and hearing their parents say, “You have made a difference Joe’s life!”
- Opportunity to be a pastor to other people in a small town, beyond the congregation’s membership
- Love and joy of involvement with your family in the congregation’s ministries
- Development of close friendships within the congregation

2. Spiritual Service to People:

- Joy of being in Spirit-filled worship services with God’s people
- Satisfaction in accurately communicating God’s word to people
- Knowing that a sermon connected with and made a difference in someone’s life
- Positive responses from individuals regarding the personal value to them of a particular worship service
- Being able to see the fruit of your preaching and teaching labors
- Being with people who have not previously had this level of pastoral care
- Being able to be there for people in their grief
- Seeing people get plugged in to their areas of giftedness and passions
- Watching people change (spiritually and emotionally), grow closer to God, and take ownership of their congregation’s ministries
- Seeing changes in hearts, not just in membership growth
- Seeing people released from bondage
- Seeing people affirm one another despite conflict and differences of opinion
- Watching parents bring their children for baptism and Christian rearing
- Bringing people to Christ
- Having an un-churched person to whom you relate show up for worship and hook up with Christ

3. Strengthening the Congregation:

- Watching the church weather hard times and come out on the other side
- The building of congregational synergy and team spirit
- Growth of enthusiasm and positive fellowship in the congregation as a whole
- Cooperation and people volunteering for ministries without being asked
- Seeing the congregation's organization working well, with people happy to serve
- Seeing responsiveness to a plea for high attendance at special services and events
- Seeing people focus on what God wants them to do by discussing questions such as, "What can we do to help this church serve its community?" and "How can we build a congregational fellowship that serves this community?"
- Seeing hope spring up where only despair has reigned
- Seeing a rebirth and expansion of the congregation's ministries and mission
- Seeing people catch a new vision and succeed where they have failed before
- Watching the congregation blossom in self-confidence and competence
- Seeing people overcome negativity, become more prayerful, more inviting, and more welcoming to new attendees
- Seeing growth in membership and attendance
- Feel like you made a difference, leaving things better than you found them

D. What are the greatest points of pain in small-church ministry? The several dozen highly effective small-church pastors interviewed in this study responded to that question with the following comments, which fit into five categories.

1. Personal Challenges:

- Recognition that I'll never be accepted as genuinely part of the local community, regardless of how long I stay
- The sense of loneliness and isolation that comes from having few close friends
- A small town's school system is not always the best for one's children
- The pastor's children do not always quickly adapt to the new school system and community
- Death of people I love, and conducting their funeral services
- Being hurt by someone you have helped in several ways
- Not always able to openly say what you think in meetings and elsewhere
- The pain resulting from becoming too personally involved with people
- Finding appropriate time for family relationships and responsibilities
- Grief at leaving and moving to another pastorate

2. Change-Resistance Challenges:

- Irrational thinking with regard to the congregation's traditional ways of doing things
- Seeing people in the congregation not getting on board with ministry expansion and finding fault with membership growth
- When people show what appears to be irrational animosity toward change
- People who keep resisting changes, even when the results of new ideas are positive
- People who continuously criticize their pastor, despite the church's obvious progress

3. *Community Challenges:*

- Frustration over so few new people to draw from in a small town
- Seeing a small town's population gradually decline and its school system move toward disappearing
- The conflicts in a small town, such as with the school board, tend to spill over into the congregation

4. *Congregational Challenges:*

- Lay leaders whose lack of relational skills makes them come across to others as a "blaming personality"
- Growing weary of peoples' pettiness and the inclination of some to repeatedly hurt others in the congregation
- People not walking their talk and growing spiritually
- Concern about where our congregation is headed in the next five to ten years, especially with regard to how we can pay the ever-increasing health insurance costs
- When people don't get it!
- Growing pains associated with increasing costs and space needs, plus administrative structure changes required to move beyond the "Mayberry Style" of administration and organization
- Stress associated with the changing cultural levels of the newest church members compared to the older, long-term members
- People remaining unresponsive to God
- Stress provoked by internal conflict among members due to personal and sometimes long-standing animosities
- When parishioners need reconciliation with one another and that does not happen

5. *Professional Challenges:*

- The pastor's challenge of maintaining a balance between the equally important functions of (a) maintaining positive relationships with parishioners and (b) exerting strong leadership toward new ideas
- The expectation by some people that the pastor take on too many roles, such as youth ministry, because there is no one else to do it
- The pervasive feeling that I never do enough, having to choose among several needs that I want to meet, and the ever-present wish for more time to perform a higher quality ministry and be a better pastor
- Stresses created by what someone called "VDPs" (Very Draining People) who require a high volume of emotional attention, plus stresses created by individuals with various types of problem personalities
- The need to be eternally vigilant against hurt feelings, since in a small congregation "Everyone has influence!"
- Tendency to listen to the 5 percent who are chronic complainers in every congregation and respond either (a) by *internalizing* their criticism (something must be lacking in me, so I should leave the ministry) or (b) by *generalizing* their criticism (all churches are like this, so why should I stay in ministry?)
- Don't always get my desired results
- Looking at several empty pews each Sunday, despite a growing attendance
- Despite growth of this small church, I still see so many people with unrealized potential
- Wishing we had more children and youth so as to build a magnetic nucleus

- Wishing to know how to reach more people and draw them in
- Working with counselees who can't change their behaviors
- The feeling of personal rejection when people leave and go to another local congregation because they do not agree with their church's vision and/or I do not understand why they are leaving
- Recognition that when people like the pastor, he or she can do no wrong; when people don't like the pastor, he or she can do no right

E. What are the greatest needs of pastors in small-church ministry? The several dozen highly effective small-church pastors interviewed in this study responded to that question with the following comments that seem to fit into three categories.

1. Personal Needs:

- Like other people, pastors need to be loved, respected, and noticed
- See his or her role as a genuine calling, not a job, which keeps the pastor from giving up during difficult periods
- Willingness to lead by making personal sacrifices
- Be on fire for God—which motivates me to make home visits and put out the kind of energy necessary to accomplish my calling
- To feel a strong call by God to serve this congregation
- The spiritually fueled feeling that what I'm doing is significant, where I'm doing it is significant, and that my ministry is equal in value to that of pastors in larger churches
- A healthy spiritual life and outlook by the pastor that is foundational to effective ministry
- A committed group of lay leaders that pray for and with you; thus, providing local peer support from a team of people focused on the same goals
- Affirmation by the congregation's members, which seems to come more as a result of pastoral care skills than from pulpit abilities
- Be willing to receive the love that the congregation bestows
- Economic stability—many young pastors are paying off student loans
- A spouse who fits into the local community
- Willingness to admit being human and making mistakes
- Willingness to develop real relationships with church members—even though there is some emotional risk involved—since those relationships are essential to the pastor's family
- The ability to cope with ego-fueled temptations to move to another church when my ministry is still producing good results
- The personal background of having grown up in a small town, which helps me to understand the unique nature of small town life and culture
- Learning how to live in solitude in a small-town setting where the pastor does not always feel included and accepted
- Seed planting is our work in ministry, but if the seed does not come up, we must practice the Grace we preach by forgiving people and forgiving ourselves
- Time away from ministries for renewal of emotional energy and spiritual motivations
- Some type of hobby or enjoyment outlet that distracts me from congregational stresses and restores perspective
- A quiet place to which the pastor can periodically withdraw that refreshes the mind and refocuses perspective and priorities

2. *Professional Skills:*

- Develop and maintain a strong pattern of personal, daily prayer
- A bigger vision for ministry, even in a small town—since many clergy and church members have a vision for their church that matches their experiences in the largest previous congregation with which they were involved
- Read the expanding literature on small-church ministry
- Ways to broaden horizons and obtain new ideas
- More administrative skills with regard to organizational leadership and equipping parishioners for ministries
- More training with regard to laypersons and their needs, such as youth ministry, grief counseling, and senior adult ministry
- Access to more training and resources that fit the unique nature of a small church
- Greater clarity regarding what I'll face before I begin serving as pastor of a small church
- More administrative skills with regard to organizational leadership and equipping parishioners for ministries
- Sufficient years of practical experience to develop effective people skills
- Time management skills such as how to block time for sermons and prayer and how to communicate that to the local community as well as to members of the congregation
- Pace oneself, to avoid burnout derived from attempting to “be the church” for the congregation rather than encouraging the people to “be the church” for one another and the community
- Avoid the ego-driven feeling that I am God's gift to this church; instead, feeling that the people in this church are God's gift
- Avoid the ego-driven tendency to become the congregation's identity instead of helping the congregation find its unique identity
- The recognition of John Maxwell's often-quoted principle: a pastor has no power but a pastor has influence
- Willingness to relate in personal ways to the congregation's power brokers, so as to influence the congregation's direction
- Recognize the enormous opportunities inherent in one-on-one, one-person-at-a-time influences
- Learn that ministry is about the *person* of the pastor and relationships with the *persons* in the church
- More time to be with my people
- Be friendly to people—inside and outside the congregation.
- Obtain ideas from people outside the congregation and the local community
- Obtain ideas from drinking coffee with local, un-churched residents
- To learn that the layperson with a “gift of the critical eye” is not just a problem or a jerk but someone who can help to improve a good idea
- Topical workshops and seminars, conducted in the local church rather than at district events that only a few of the congregation's leaders are willing to attend
- To learn that behind every depressed person is anger—and that anger is often a mask for depression, low self-esteem, and the need to be noticed
- Develop the habit of not taking criticism personally and not making assumptions regarding other peoples' motives—you don't know what you don't know
- Learn to do your best and let that be enough

3. *Professional Relationships:*

- To see the denominational leaders move beyond their overt and covert negative communication regarding “the wrongness of being a small church”
- Feel genuinely supported and valued by the regional denominational staff, so as to move beyond the feeling that small churches get their leftover time—which, in turn, causes lay leaders to begin responding to that feeling with smaller and smaller contributions to denominational missions causes
- For regional denominational staff to view the pastor as serving in a specialty of ministry—rather than putting in time in an unproductive backwater location, on a stepping stone that eventually leads to a larger church
- To feel a sense of genuine “inclusion” by other pastors—to counterbalance the tendency of some clergy in larger churches to make me feel like a peon at denominational meetings
- A friend and/or mentor to whom I can relate—from outside the congregation
- A group of local pastors in my denomination that meet weekly and provide the opportunity to vent feelings in the context of peer support
- Time to participate in meaningful fellowship, encouragement, supportive community, and spiritual collegiality with other clergy for a full day each month
- An intentional accountability system with other trusted pastors, fueled by monthly meetings
- Continuous relationships with and support from peers who serve congregations of a similar size—to combat isolation, loneliness, and a tendency toward low morale
- Meeting monthly with a group of small-church pastors for (1) mutual support, (2) learning new ideas, (3) training such as preaching skills, and (4) spiritual growth
 - *Virtually all* small-church pastors report that they find benefit *only from meetings with clergy from small congregations*—not from the classic denominational cluster meetings of pastors in churches of every size from a specific geographic area, which small-church pastors view as a needless waste of time.
 - Small-church pastors learn much more from their professional peers in small churches than from conversations with clergy of large or midsize congregations.

Someone identified effective clergy as people with competency, compassion, and character.

That assessment is accurate but insufficient. Three more qualities are essential. Nothing substitutes for high energy, strong motivation, and aggressive learning:

1. Research indicates that *high-energy people* usually accomplish three to five times as much as low-energy people.
2. *Strong motivation* is another essential. When she or he does not feel motivated toward excellence in leadership effectiveness—but rather treats the small church as a preaching point or a paycheck—a great deal of nothing happens, over and over.
3. Effective pastors of small churches are *aggressive learners* who constantly search for new ideas by which to put operational wheels under the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

Appendix: Books and Resources for Small-Church Ministry

The items in this section have an established track record in assisting clergy and laity in small congregations with their efforts to strengthen personal and congregational effectiveness.

A. What books or resources are helpful in small-church ministry? When asked that question, the several dozen highly effective small-church pastors interviewed in this study, their answers fell into three general categories. Listed below are few of those answers.

Spiritual Formation Resource:

- *Experiencing God*, Henry T. Blackaby & Claude V. King (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers).
- *The Four Agreements* Don Miguel Ruiz (San Rafael, California: Amber-Allen Publishing, 1997) and the 48-Card Deck by the same title, author, and publisher—valuable for daily devotional application of the book’s principles.
- *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire* Jim Cymbala (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997)
- *They Call Me Pastor* H. B. London, Jr., et al (Ventura, California: Regal Books)
- *The Knowledge of the Holy* A. W. Tozer (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1961)
- *Partners in Prayer* John Maxwell (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996)

How-to-do-it Methodology:

- *The Small Church Is Different!* Lyle E. Schaller (Nashville: Abingdon Press).
- *Leading Beyond the Walls*, Adam Hamilton (Nashville: Abingdon Press)
- *The Indispensable Guide for Smaller Churches*, David R. Ray (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press)
- The recognition and utilization of their spiritual gifts for ministry by parishioners—through use of the material such as the following:
 - *Serving from the Heart*, Adam Hamilton (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002).
 - *Church Effectiveness Nuggets, Volume 24, Identifying and Mobilizing Parishioners’ Spiritual Gifts* (Download free at www.TheParishPaper.com).
- *Becoming a Contagious Christian* Bill Hybels and Mark Mittelberg (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994)
- *Church Effectiveness Nuggets, Volume 14, 25 Turnaround Strategies for Small-Membership Congregations* (download free at www.TheParishPaper.com).
- *Purpose Driven Church* Rick Warren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1995)
- *Shepherding the Small Church* Glenn Daman, (Kregel, Inc. PO Box 2607, Grand Rapids, MI 49501)
- *Small Strong Congregations* Kennon L. Callahan (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000)
- *Spiritual Entrepreneurs* Michael Slaughter (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995)

Preaching Resources:

- Preaching and worship resources such as desperatepreacher.com (a subscription and chat site); sermoncentral.com (sermons and illustrative stories); and *Church Worship Magazine*, 165 Plaza Drive, Prescott, Arizona 86303.
- Max Lucado’s books, which deliver biblical ideas in simple word-packages

B. Prayer Web Plan. This approach overcomes the deficiency of the traditional prayer-chain model; namely, weak links can break the chain of communication (one person who does not call the next person on the chain blocks information from the remaining people on the chain).

The purpose for the prayer web is two-fold: (1) to create a more rapid deployment of our prayer-warriors and (2) to insure a more complete covering by allowing fewer breaking points (in traditional prayer chains, weak links can stop the communication process).

When a prayer concern is presented to the Web Leader, he or she contacts two others on the prayer web. Each person then contacts two others on the web.

At the bottom of each prayer web column, the last person contacts the name at the top of the next web column. The final person contacts the lead caller, which assures that the process succeeded.

It is essential that each of the group leaders (G2, G3, and G4) have a passion for prayer, since they stand at the easiest points to break the web.

The pattern can be extended by adding more groups and more individuals within a group.

The pattern looks like this:

Web Leader ⇒ ⇓	G2 Leader ⇒ ⇓	G3 Leader ⇒ ⇓	G4 Lead ⇒ Web Leader ⇓
G1 #2 ⇒ ⇓	G2 #2 ⇒ ⇓	G3 #2⇒ ⇓	Caller ⇒ G1 #2 ⇓
G1 #3 ⇒ ⇓	G2 #3 ⇒ ⇓	G3 #3⇒ ⇓	Caller ⇒ G1 #3 ⇓
G1 #4 ⇒ ⇓	G2 #4 ⇒ ⇓	G3 #4⇒ ⇓	G4 #4 ⇒ G1 #4 ⇓
Web Lead	G2 Lead	G3 Lead	G4 Lead

C. Increasing the number of people who engage in daily prayer: Ask people to include in their daily conversation with God the habit of praying (by name) for other members, the pastor, the staff, and various ministries.

Create a sheet or folder from the material below by (a) photocopying on a single sheet of paper or (b) printing front and back on one-half-page card stock or (c) printing on a billfold-size, two-fold (three-panel) card.

Insert a copy in each worship bulletin.

Preach through it as a sermon outline. Ask people to commit to its use for fourteen consecutive days.

You do not have permission to alter in any manner the wording on this copyrighted prayer card. This model has been tested and revised several time over many years. Any alteration of the words is an express violation of United States and International Copyright Law. Reproductions must carry the copyright notice.

To download a free electronic version of the prayer card on the next page, go to the www.TheParishPaper.com Web site.

The Secret to Abundant Living: Learning How to Ask

“Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7).

“And in the morning, a great while before day, he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed” (Mark 1:35).

Ten Steps to God

Many people feel they should pray, but few know how. The following steps, if used fifteen minutes daily for fourteen consecutive days, enable you to experience God’s peace, joy, and power in a way you have never known before.

As you begin this adventure, remember that prayer is an experience, not an idea. Prayer is like riding a bicycle. You only learn by doing it, never by thinking about doing it.

Few people experience God’s presence as fully during their first three or four days as they do after several days of practice.

The experience of God’s presence is impossible to define. But when it happens, you understand why great Christian leaders of every century have so enthusiastically recommended and practiced prayer. You understand what Jeremiah meant when he said, “You will seek me and find me; when you seek me with all your heart. . . .” (Jeremiah 29:13).

1. In preparation, set aside fifteen minutes in a location where you can be physically relaxed and uninterrupted. Read one or two chapters from the Bible, listening for what God says to you. This helps to erase distracting thoughts from the blackboard of your mind. The following passages are especially helpful in preparing for prayer: John 14, Psalm 23, Matthew 5:1-12, Romans 8:35-39, 1 Corinthians 13, Psalm 46, Romans 12, John 15, Psalm 27, Psalm 103, Psalm 121, Isaiah 55, Luke 15, Psalm 84, John 1:1-18, Psalm 90, Psalm 19, 1 John 4:7-21, Psalm 139, Luke 24, Psalm 130, and Luke 18:1-17.

2. Close your eyes and give thanks for three personal blessings of which you are especially conscious today. This helps you move toward God by moving away from a sense of your own self-sufficiency.

3. Ask God to help three other people you feel need God’s help today. This helps you move toward God by moving away from self-centeredness.

4. Ask God to forgive specific mistakes and sins from the last 24 hours and give you the strength to forgive others.

5. Ask God to help one person whom you find it hard to like. Ask God to give that person insights into his or her personal problems and ask for the power to let God’s love flow through you to him or her.

6. Ask God to give you sensitivity to the needs of one person today with whom you can share God’s love in word or deed.

7. Ask for insights into your personal problems.

8. Ask for help in achieving your personal goals.

9. Ask God to tell you the most important thing you need to do today to “seek first his kingdom” (Matthew 6:33).

10. Conclude by listening intently for three minutes to what God may say to you.

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Origin of the above prayer card: Several people asked a young psychotherapist at a medical clinic, “How can my Christian faith help me deal with these problems?” In response to that, the young man developed the prayer card above and gave it to people who wanted to connect their faith with their therapy. He asked patients to use the card for fifteen minutes each day.

Since the therapist typically saw each patient once a week, he could easily monitor the results. He found that some people made the following statement after their first seven days: “I felt a sense of the presence of God unlike anything I’ve ever before experienced.” At the end of their first week, other patients reported “no results, nothing happened,” but they *always* reported their experience in something like those words by the end of the second week (fourteen days): “I felt a sense of the presence of God unlike anything I’ve ever before experienced.”

During the years when the therapist was a pastor, he used the prayer therapy under quite different circumstances. For example, late one afternoon a few months after arriving in his first church out of seminary, the pastor visited the home of an inactive church member as part of his congregational get-acquainted ritual. As an oil field specialist called a “Pumper,” the man went to work early in the morning and arrived home about mid-afternoon. He welcomed the pastor and asked if he would like a cup of coffee. They sat down at the kitchen table to chat. The pastor opened with his standard line, “How are things going with you?”

“TERRIBLE!” the man answered. He added to that explosive beginning a long monologue regarding his newly appointed supervisor at work. “I don’t know what I’m going to do,” the man said, “I have a lot of retirement money built up, but I’m thinking about chunking it all and walking away. I just cannot tolerate the way this guy treats me.”

The second surprise came when, at the end of his long monologue, the man asked the young pastor, “What can I do about this?”

The pastor replied, “I can tell you what to do about that, but I don’t think you would be willing to do it.”

“Try me!” the man replied. “I’m desperate.”

The pastor responded, “I can give you a prescription that will help, but I’m skeptical about your willingness to use it. Before I give you the prescription, you would have to promise me you will follow it.”

After the man promised that he would comply, the pastor asked, “Do you have a sheet of paper?” After a brief introductory explanation that included, “Set aside fifteen minutes every morning to follow this prescription,” the pastor dictated the ten steps on the prayer card above as the man wrote them out on the first page of a yellow legal pad.

Several months later, the pastor had still not seen the man in worship. (A couple of years later, the man and his wife became active church members, but not at this point).

The pastor arrived home a bit early one afternoon. Since the oil field worker only lived three houses down the street, the pastor walked down the sidewalk and knocked on his front door.

The man welcomed him in. As usual, they sat at the kitchen table and drank coffee. The pastor fully expected to get “the rest of the story.” When he opened with, “Well, how are things going with you?” the man responded, “Just fine!” and shifted the conversation to a recent local event. As the minutes passed, the pastor waited, assuming the man would get around to discussing his “supervisor problem.” That did not happen. They talked about the rainstorms, the snowstorms, the sandstorms, the ball games, and local happenings.

Overcome with curiosity, the pastor thought, I’ll tell him that I’d better be getting on down the road. Then, when he knows that I’m leaving, he will bring up this sensitive, personal subject. However, in this case, that time-tested technique (a form of which had virtually always worked forty-five minutes into a fifty-minute therapy hour at the clinic) failed to elicit the expected response.

Finally, as they walked toward the door, the pastor said, “Oh, I forgot to ask. How did that problem at work ever come out?”

“What problem?” the man asked, seeming puzzled.

“I seem to remember that when we talked several months ago,” the pastor said, “you were going through a stressful time with a new supervisor at work.”

“Oh, that,” the man replied.

“How did that ever come out?” the pastor asked.

“He changed!” the man said.

Prayer does not merely change the person who prays. Research by the parapsychology department at Duke University and medical research at several hospitals demonstrates that prayer sometimes has a scientifically verifiably influence that extends beyond the normal cause-and-effect elements of nature and human nature.

Later that year, the young pastor involved a group of twelve key leaders from his church’s governing board in an eight-week Bible study of 1st Timothy, 2nd Timothy, and Titus. During that study, the leaders make a commitment to use the ten steps on the prayer card. The results were dramatically helpful, both to the individual people in the group and to the atmosphere of the congregation. Financial stewardship improved. A couple of the lay leaders who would barely speak to each other, partly because of strife they had experienced as employees of competing oil companies, went to lunch, worked out their differences, and became good friends.

A few months later, the pastor had the prayer card printed on three-fold, billfold-sized cards. He distributed them at the midpoint of a sermon on prayer and wove the ten steps of the prayer card into the sermon content. The concluding “altar call” asked people to sign an accompanying commitment card, pledging to set aside fifteen minutes every day for the next fourteen days to use the card’s ten steps.

The content of that sermon, titled “Keeping in Touch” and included the following paragraphs, has been slightly altered for use by other pastors:

“Advertising people touched a deep human yearning a few years ago when they developed the slogan, ‘Ford Brings You a Better Idea.’ We may have different opinions about automobile brands, but that is exactly what most of us need—a better idea. Most of us are struggling with a problem of some sort in our lives. For some of us, it is a very large problem; for others, it is a series of smaller problems. But whatever the problem, we need insight regarding how to deal with it. We need a better idea.

“If we are Christians, it is easy to ask, ‘Why doesn’t God give me the answer to my problem?’ We know that God knows the answer, so why doesn’t God tell us? The Bible is full of people with whom God communicated in amazing ways: Matthew, Peter, Moses, Amos, and Isaiah. And there are other illustrations of people closer to our own time, such as David Livingston, Albert Schweitzer, E. Stanley Jones, Mother Teresa, and countless others to whom the word and power of God came in special ways. Why, then, doesn’t God communicate with me in that way? Why doesn’t God give me a better idea when I need it?

“Herb Miller says he stumbled across the answer to this question a few years ago while speaking on a university campus in New Mexico. The campus minister was showing him around the student center. As they walked down the hall, looking in different rooms, they came by a door marked ‘Prayer Room.’ Herb says, ‘I don’t think he meant to show me that one, but as we went by, I pulled the door open.’ This is how Herb described the prayer room.

‘I was amazed to see it stuffed with boxes, boots, clothes hangers, junk, and a general musty smell. On the alter stood a pair of cowboy boots, an old box that had at some earlier time contained a well-known brand of whisky, and a roll of toilet tissue. A little embarrassed, the campus minister told me that they used it for a storage area during the summer and hadn’t gotten it cleaned out yet.

‘At first glance, it seemed like a sacrilegious thing to me to stack a prayer room full of junk. I felt some righteous indignation was appropriate here. But then I realized what a dramatic picture that prayer room was of my own life. I had let important demands of my life crowd into the time I should have spent talking with God each day, until I could no longer get back into the habit of praying at all.’

“Take another look at the life of Christ. What made this man different from other people? One of the most observable differences was his prayer life. He was fully in touch with the hidden power of the universe. The disciples would often awaken early in the morning to discover Jesus missing from the camp.

When they found him, he was out by himself, praying. At other times, even in the midst of great crowds clamoring to hear him teach and many people who needed his healing touch, Jesus withdrew to a quiet place by himself to pray. If Jesus, the Son of God, needed to do that in order to stay sufficiently in touch with God to live an effective life, how can you and I expect to get by without it?

“And yet we do try to do without it, don’t we? Much of our prayer is done either because of a crisis—like the old story of the man who said he prayed the most serious prayer of his life while standing on his head after falling into a well—and out of habit (when someone asks us to start or stop a meeting by praying an invocation or benediction or by saying grace at a family dinner).

“For me, the bottom-line question of faith has come down to this: Are we or are we not alone in the universe? Is there just us? Are we alone in this room? Or is there something more here—something that we cannot see but something to which we can relate as the generations before us have related—something they have called God? If we are not alone in the universe, if there really is something here besides us, why would we not talk to that mysterious other?

“There are two major reasons why you and I do not unlock the hidden power God has put into our lives. One is that we don’t know how. The disciples had the same problem. That is why they said to Jesus, ‘Lord, teach us to pray (Luke 11:1).’ They didn’t ask Jesus to teach them how to preach or how to do evangelism, or even how to heal; but they did request instruction in how to pray.

“We are going to look today at a contemporary answer to this question of how to pray. Thousands of people throughout North America have used the pattern of prayer I want to share with you this morning. I can guarantee that if you use this pattern faithfully every day, somewhere between the third and the tenth day after you begin, you will begin experiencing the presence and power of God when you pray. That may not happen the first day you use this pattern, but it always happens within the first two weeks.”

Ask the ushers to distribute the prayer cards. While that distribution occurs, read aloud to the congregation Matthew 6:5-13 and 7:7-11.

After everyone has a prayer card, read through it aloud and illustrate some of the points. Example: “Sometimes people respond to ‘4. Ask God to help one person whom you find it hard to like.’ with a denial that they have anyone like that in their lives. I say to such people, ‘Get away from me with that. You are either lying to yourself, lying to me, or you have a very bad memory.’”

“God is trying to communicate to our minds every day, every minute of the day. Like a gigantic radio station filling the airwaves of the world around us with love, wisdom, and peace, God is reaching out to us all the time. If we tune our minds to God’s mind in prayer, we will hear the words God is constantly sending us. If we, like the disciples, learn to relate to God in prayer, we will find insights about our problems, a sense of direction for our lives, and a new power to live in God’s will. That is the great good news of Christmas and Pentecost—not that God came to people once a long time ago but that God still comes to people today.

“‘But how can I do that?’ you ask. ‘I’m so busy. I am so short on time.’ But let’s put that question another way. If someone called you on the telephone and said, ‘If you will get up just fifteen minutes earlier every morning for the next several days, I’ll send someone to your house each day during that time. Each morning, he will knock on the door and give you a one-hundred-dollar bill.’

“What would you say? ‘I just don’t have time; I just can’t get up that early!’

“Isn’t it equally ridiculous to say that we don’t have time to pray? The real question, you see, is ‘Can I afford not to pray?’ With this kind of power available free, can I afford not to learn how to pray?

“A traveler was sitting at the counter in the Albuquerque airport restaurant, waiting on a plane and drinking coffee. The waitress was talking with a man seated next to him at the counter. From the conversation, the traveler realized that the two were old friends. The man asked her how she liked her trip to Japan. After recounting a few of her experiences, she said, ‘It was wonderful, but I sure am glad to be home. You know, if you don’t speak the language, it’s real hard.’

“That sentence stuck in the traveler’s mind like a spear: ‘If you don’t speak the language, it’s real hard.’

“That’s the way it is with God and us. Prayer is the language by which you speak to God, and more importantly, by which God speaks to you. And if you don’t speak the language, it’s real hard to know God is there. It’s real hard to receive from God the insights that God wants to give you.

“How is it with you? Do you speak the language?”

D. Prayers for the pastor and people.

Mother Teresa attributes this prayer to Cardinal Newman in her book, *In My Own Words* (New York: Random House, 1996), page 10. Mother Teresa says that the Missionaries of Charity pray the prayer every day.

“Fragrance”

Jesus, help me to spread your fragrance wherever I am.
Fill my heart with your Spirit and your life.
Penetrate my being and take such hold of me that my life becomes a radiation of your own life.
Give your light through me and remain in me in such a way that every soul I come in contact with can feel your presence in me.
May people not see me, but see you in me.
Remain in me, so that I shine with your light, and may others be illuminated by my light.
All light will come from you, Oh Jesus.
Not even the smallest ray of light will be mine.
You will illuminate others through me.
Place on my lips your greatest praise, illuminating others around me.
May I preach you with actions more than with words, with the example of my actions, with the visible light of the love that comes from you to my heart. Amen.

“Deliver Me,” by Mother Teresa

Deliver Me, O Jesus, from the desire of being loved,	From the fear of being humiliated,
From the desire of being extolled,	From the fear of being despised,
From the desire of being honored,	From the fear of suffering rebukes,
From the desire of being praised,	From the fear of being calumniated,
From the desire of being preferred,	From the fear of being forgotten,
From the desire of being consulted,	From the fear of being wronged,
From the desire of being approved,	From the fear of being ridiculed,
From the desire of being popular,	From the fear of being suspected.
	Amen.

Wesley Covenant Prayer

I am no longer my own, but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee, exalted for thee or brought low by thee.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things
to thy pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it. And the covenant which I have
made on earth,
Let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.

E. Laity mobilization through passion identification:

**Throckmorton
First United Methodist
Church**

Our Covenant

“As members . . . we renew our covenant faithfully to participate in the ministries of the church by our prayers, our presence, our gifts, and our service, that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.”

How will you participate in the covenant?

Where is YOUR passion?

My passion is to invest myself in children

- teach Sunday School
- help with Rockers and Huggers
- help with Vacation Bible School
- sponsor special events
- help with chimes

My passion is to be with youth and get involved with their lives

- help with youth program
- help prepare meals
- sponsor youth events
- teach Sunday School

My passion is to help adults grow in a small group setting

- teach Sunday School
- lead a short-term class
- lead an on-going home group
- host an on-going group in my home

My passion is to be involved with music

- sing in the choir
- play chimes
- help with special music
- play instrument in worship

My passion is to help with worship

- greet people as they arrive
- help with children’s time
- help with communion preparation
- be an usher

My passion is to help with special events

- participate in special worship events
- help with flowers and plants
- help with decoration of sanctuary
- host an on-going group in my home

{More on the back}

{Detach and Send to Church Office}

Name: _____

Phone: _____

God has given me a passion for the things I’ve checked on the back of this form.

My passion is helping those in need

- helping with mission projects
- helping with Mission-in-Motion
- helping with Thanksgiving baskets
- helping with Christmas Angels

My passion is reaching outside of the church

- visiting shut-ins and hospitalized
- preparing meals for funerals and other occasions
- helping plan outreach opportunities
- work with Harvest Festival
- visitation in homes and hospitals
- discipleship programs

My passion is for the physical beauty of the building

- upkeep of the grounds
- upkeep of the parsonage
- upkeep of the church
- planning use of the facility
- preparing bulletin boards

My passion is for the effective use of financial resources

- plan the budget for the church
- plan and implement financial projects for the church
- be an example of giving

My passion is for prayer

- be apart of the prayer web
- help keep track of prayer concerns for bulletin and newsletter
- participate in special prayer events

My passion is for administration

- be willing to serve through pastor-parish relations
- be willing to lead or participate on a church committee

My passion is:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> to invest myself in children | <input type="checkbox"/> helping those in need |
| <input type="checkbox"/> to be with youth and get involved in their lives | <input type="checkbox"/> reaching outside of the church |
| <input type="checkbox"/> to help adults grow in a small group setting | <input type="checkbox"/> for the physical beauty of the building |
| <input type="checkbox"/> to be involved with music | <input type="checkbox"/> for the effective use of financial resources |
| <input type="checkbox"/> to help with worship | <input type="checkbox"/> for prayer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> to be involved with special events | <input type="checkbox"/> for administration |