

REFLECTIONS ON THE TRANSITION PROCESS

King of kings Lutheran Church Shelby Township, Michigan

VISION - A few years into my ministry at King of kings, I sensed something needed to change. We were a fairly traditional congregation, located in a growing community, blessed with growth, and an ever increasing work load for the pastor. My leadership style was hands-on and I was the primary care giver for our members. Our Long Range Planning Committee was projecting continued growth and I knew my style was not going to keep pace. I needed to move outside my paradigm and my comfort zone, working differently (smarter) - not just harder. Someone suggested I read George Barna's *The Power of Vision*. It began a revolution for me. What I learned was that great organizations are led by visionary leaders who can point toward a new preferred future. I worked through the appendix material of Barna's book, studying and praying that God would help me discover His vision for us. The result was a vision to reach people who do not know Jesus. Lots of things needed to change in my ministry.

INSIDE/OUTSIDE - Several years ago there was an extensive study of membership in the Lutheran Church which revealed that growing congregations focus on reaching people who are not now members. Many Christians would agree that churches are supposed to reach out, just as they also believe their church is friendly. The problem is that they don't really reach out to others and newcomers find them more cold and closed. They are friendly to their members. Most churched people think that the congregation's purpose is to take care of its members. By definition, the church *is* its members, which translated - means the church is here to take care of itself. We were going to focus outside our walls, reaching people who were not a part of the church.

NEW PARADIGM - With Council permission, I handpicked a team of good process thinkers and invited them to be a part of a Vision Team. We commissioned them to reshape King of kings to reach people in the 21st century. They read Bill Easum's *Sacred Cows Make Gourmet Burgers*, Peter Drucker's *Managing the Non-Profit Organization*, and many other books on leadership from both church and business circles. I shared wisdom from the late Edwin Friedman on the *Leadership Vacuum* and the paralysis that results from trying to please everyone in an organization. The team decided to flesh out God's vision. Our mission (*what we do*) is to welcome people in, help them grow, and send them out to care for others. Our vision (*what we are becoming*) is to help people work toward putting Christ first in their lives. Welcome, Grow, Care - Put Christ first. It was the great commission of Jesus shaped for this place and time. We also articulated our values so that our present and future members would know why we were doing what we were doing. Leaders who were able to make the transition became a part of the new leadership team.

THE DIFFERENCE - I am convinced that the difference came when we decided to actually live by our values, mission, and vision. Many congregations are ineffective because they are so fearful of doing something that might offend someone that they end up doing nothing at all. The good Rabbi Friedman had taught in his best Yiddish accent: *Effectiveness - Niceness - they're not the same thing!* We made a conscious decision to do whatever we needed to do to be effective in reaching unchurched people for the 21st century. We read books by John Maxwell, George Barna, Lyle Schaller, Dale Galloway, George Hunter, Bobb Biehl, Carl George, and Leonard Sweet. We attended conferences with Bill Hybels at Willow Creek, Rick Warren at Saddleback, Mike Foss at Prince of Peace, Walt Kallestad at Church of Joy, Mike Slaughter at Ginghamburg, and John Ed Mathison at Frazer Memorial. We brought in experts and listened to tapes. Much of the impetus for these changes came from the pastor, supported by a core of leaders. The Vision Team presented a plan to the Council, which shifted our entire paradigm for church. It affected structure, governance, ministry, staff, leaders, worship - our whole way of doing things. The Pastor visited every leader on the Council inviting their full support. We voted to suspend portions of the constitution and start doing things anew. Leaders who were not willing to make the transition were asked to step down. Most began a three year journey through a frustrating and joyfilled transition. We've learned these things are important:

ARTICULATE THE VISION - We find people want clear direction. State the purpose of the church and decide to pay the price to accomplish the purpose. The most important task of the leaders and the pastor is articulating the mission/vision. We structured around the mission. We budget around the mission. We preach it, teach it, and sing about it. We put it on banners and signs and billboards. It's in print. We talk about it. It's everywhere - all the time. We tell new members our mission and invite them to not join if they can't buy in. God has pointed direction for us - and we think the church is a theocracy, not a democracy.

LETTING THE VISION SHAPE US - We find people look for integrity in the local church. We value the Bible as the inspired Word of God, and we are called to live with integrity according to biblical principles. The most significant shift took place as the values, mission, and vision became the control mechanism. Neither the pastor or any leader is in control. Personal opinions have become less significant. We now hear people asking: What does the Bible say about this or what does God want us to do here? The Council can argue against a new idea only if it runs counter to the VMV. If someone senses the call to begin a new ministry that is consistent with VMV, it is the task of staff and leaders to support and enable that person and their new ministry.

BEING A WELCOMING PLACE - We find that people have difficulty when first coming to church. We value reaching outside our four walls to speak Christ's word of welcome to all people. We learned who was here in the community. We are surrounded by formerly church baby boomers and baby busters. We decided to shape our ministry to meet their needs, rather than the needs of the people who are already members. We ask the staff and leaders to be servant leaders, i.e. - taking the distant parking spaces to provide the better spaces for new comers. We ask members to wear name tags to help others feel welcome. We design our worship schedule to be convenient and our worship style to be culturally relevant. We presently offer one traditional liturgical worship and three more relaxed and contemporary worship opportunities. One of the services is on Saturday, not because the staff or members wanted it, but because many people work on Sunday, and Saturday works for them. We practice biblical hospitality, meeting the real life needs of others. We print the worship service in the worship folder, and announce everything so it's easier to follow along. The language of the service is clear and in plain English. Sermons are relevant to everyday life and presented with a printed teaching outline so people can bring the message home. Members shape many sermon topics and sermon series themes. Lobby conversations about church business are discouraged on Sunday. Members are encouraged to spend the first three minutes after the service (known as the three minute rule) seeking out someone they do not know. Holy huddles (members talking with other members) are discouraged. We refer to members and friends, not non-members. Greeters, hospitality station, Bring a Friend Sundays, new resident welcome letters, *May I Help You?* buttons, and a spirit of friendship are just some of the ways we try to help people get connected from their first time here.

RELATIONSHIPS - We find that people want to grow, in both life skills and in faith. It may be a class on sharing your faith without being obnoxious or financial planning or surviving the teenage years or improving your communication skills. Growth happens best in relationships, so we provide lots of opportunity for Small Groups. Expectations are clearly communicated in the new member orientation and to all members during our Recommitment

Season of Gifts (time and abilities) that we all need to be a part of some Small Group or Ministry Team. Some groups are relational, some are ministry teams, some are administrative task teams, some focus on Bible study and learning. People are encouraged to grow in faith and to help others to grow.

MAKING DISCIPLES - We find that people want to connect faith and life. We value following Jesus as both Savior and Lord. Members regularly hear that we are becoming more like Jesus. Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Church* has been a helpful guide for us in moving beyond the old paradigm categories of non-members and members to a process that assists people in moving from seeker to a fully devoted follower of Christ. We have stopped assuming that people are biblically literate. We are trying to help people move from being a believer (knowing Jesus as Savior) to being a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ (knowing Jesus as Lord). Expectations are communicated clearly. We think many Lutheran congregations make it hard to become a member and gain a sense of belonging - and then make it easy to remain a member, because membership means and requires so little. We think it ought to be the other way around. Help people easily get connected and then assist them in their lifelong journey of growing in faith and commitment to Jesus Christ. Lower the barriers to belonging and raise the standards of what it means to be a member. High expectations will bring positive results. Preaching is the best vehicle for us to communicate the importance of discipleship to people.

GIFTS AND MINISTRY - We find that people want to get involved in some way to make a difference. We believe that every member is gifted for ministry. Spiritual gift assessment and personal counseling for ministry placement is a part of joining the congregation. We value using our God given gifts as participants in the ministry of the church. We teach that every member has a ministry. We must obviously staff the core ministries of the church, but we encourage people to look at their gifts and passions and find the ministry God has called them to. Ephesians 4, 1 Peter 4, Romans 12, and 1 Corinthians 12 seem to suggest that God will supply the body with what the body needs - to do what the body is supposed to do. All the gifts needed are already here. We don't begin with the congregation's needs and try to fill them, we start with the gifts of people and allow the gifts to shape the congregation's ministry. We find out what the real life needs of people are and try to meet them. If someone senses a need and has the gifts and passion, they are supported and encouraged to start a new ministry. This extends to the care of members. As pastor, I am not the primary care-giver. The Bible calls the pastor to equip people for ministry and calls the people to care for each other. Tele-care ministers, visitation teams, small group leaders, a health care team, a parish nurse, a counseling center, and a team of prayer partners all help care for others.

TEAM BASED AND PERMISSION GIVING - We find that people want an environment that encourages ministry. We have worked to minimize control, opting instead for maximum permission giving with lots of accountability and clear lines of communication. We define success as people doing ministry, teamwork with accountability, leaders who develop other leaders, and faithfulness to our mission. We have worked to separate governance and ministry functions. A small number of teams concentrate on running the business side of the congregation. Over a hundred ministry teams have primary responsibility for their particular ministry. For example: the drama team oversees all aspects of our drama ministry, no one oversees their decisions. Rather than being a committee member with lots of things to take care of, our people tend toward being specialists. They have a smaller area of responsibility with lots of authority over their area. We discourage people from criticizing someone else's area of ministry, so if you are concerned about the library, join the library team. When people are gifted for and called to a ministry; trained, equipped, and supported; and are trusted with responsibility for something; their investment is high and passions run deep. Our staff (consisting primarily of part time, trained lay specialists) each concentrate on one area, helping people do ministry.

CHALLENGES - This ministry paradigm has exploded the ministry, membership, and outreach of our congregation. It also presents several specific challenges that seem to be a continuing part of the new climate.

- **CHANGE** - all of us experience constant change, which at times makes us weary (the only constant is change)
- **COMMUNICATION** - constant communication across the organizational network is a necessity (needs, decisions, ideas)
- **LEADERSHIP** - leaders must be leaders, not doers of ministry (we are constantly mentoring others)
- **TRUST** - there is a need for high levels of trust and accountability in a permission giving environment
- **STRONG LEADERSHIP** - it is important that key leaders are strong leaders and good vision casters (esp. the pastor)

IT'S BEEN FUN! It's a lot of work! It's costly. (About one in ten of our people chose to leave over the last three years). The rewards are phenomenal! It's biblical! Call us if we can help you in the process of preparing for ministry in the 21st century.

