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A Wonderful Question From a Church (in Your Neighbourhood?)

Earlier in the spring, a concerned congregational member sent me an e-mail with some questions. I decided to ask the real experts - active congregational leaders - how they would answer these questions. The first responses were printed in the May 2009 PCPak, but additional wonderful responses came in. Here are the original questions:



1. What should we use as a re-visioning process?
2. If the younger, “biblically illiterate” and unchurched majority around us are, indeed, as spiritually hungry as is widely reported, how should we approach them without alarming our traditional base?
3. If it is true, as has been argued, that music, not doctrine, defines the boundaries among Protestant congregations today, how should we approach such a reality?
4. If the answers to the three questions above push us to alternative worship opportunities, what pitfalls should we avoid?



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Life
Congregational

Responses From Leaders in Presbyterian Churches in Canada

I. What should we use as a re-visioning process?

Idea!

It is important to get the right people together for dialogue, brainstorming and conversation. Combine the experience and ownership of long-term members with the fresh perspective of newer members and different age groups. In our case, it was important to have a positive team leader dedicated to the re-visioning process who also had the respect and trust of the long-term members of the church.

Re-visioning can be a long and laborious process, especially if there is resistance to change. We found that meetings dedicated to the topic, especially day or overnight retreats, have been the best way for us to focus on conversations around vision and strategy.

Appropriate communication with the congregation is vital throughout the process. It's good for the congregation to feel that they have a voice, but it is more important to develop an awareness that the congregation is being led to know God's perspective and what God wants for the church in the community. This involves preaching, teaching and prayer, along with conversations, brainstorming, collecting data, etc.

Re-visioning requires a group of people dedicated to stepping back from what is known in order to imagine what could be. It also requires skills and energy to take ideas and turn them into a workable plan for communication, development and implementation. While we were going through the re-visioning process, we recognized that we needed someone on staff dedicated to the administration and leadership involved with development.

One of the most helpful resources for us has been *Experiencing God* by Henry Blackaby.

Idea!

As a result of our re-visioning process, we made these changes:

- using a Praise Team to enhance the worship service with contemporary music and to assist with the learning of newer hymns from the *Book of Praise*
- using multimedia ministry (LCD projector with screen)
- forming Committee of the Whole (COW) session meetings where the session informally meets on a Saturday morning to discuss important issues
- removing front and back pews to enlarge the space around the communion table and the space at the back of the church for people to mingle when they enter or leave the sanctuary.

Idea!

We have used a couple of approaches to visioning. One was "Appreciative Inquiry" - <http://www.clergyleadership.com>. This model affirms what the congregation values and feels are "good things."

More recently, we used a simple process that one of my elders used in business. It consisted of "The R-Factor Question" and the "D.O.S. Worksheet." The R-Factor question asks: If we were meeting here three years from today, looking back over that time, what happened during that period for you to be satisfied with your progress? It was important to be very concrete. For instance, we stated that each person in the congregation could look back and identify six others whom they had helped follow Jesus by connecting them or reconnecting them with a church.

Then you work on D.O.S.:

D - Three biggest dangers to be eliminated

O - Three biggest opportunities to be focused on and captured

S - Three biggest strengths to be reinforced.

In the end, whatever the process, there needs to be someone who is the keeper of the vision (usually the minister, although elders and other leaders need to help). Process only goes so far. Someone has to make it happen. Prayer is crucial. The leaders in the church need to be praying for the vision. Make the prayer requests as concrete as possible.

Idea!

We are just beginning a re-visioning process for our church. A few of us heard Diana Butler-Bass speak, and then we decided to do a book study on her book *Christianity for the Rest of Us*. We are trying to re-vision by being very intentional in being what Butler-Bass calls a “practicing” congregation. We are creating opportunities for people to participate in the life of the church and nurture traditional practices such as hospitality, Bible study, theological reflection, prayer, testimony, worship, and mission. This is all part of our re-visioning process.

We also invited a guest - a minister from a neighbouring church - to lead us in a re-visioning process next year with our session and other church leaders. There is no quick fix or magic bullet that will help us come up with a new vision instantaneously. We have come to the realization that this new vision will develop over many years of consistent and faithful effort and work.

Idea!

I have found that, by and large, Presbyterians appreciate concrete thinking. Essentially, I think that our congregations do significantly better at strategic planning than they do at “visioning.” That is why I have used, almost exclusively, Kennon Callahan’s *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church* material for helping congregations determine their future directions in ministry. Because it approaches the whole of congregational life through the twelve “lenses” of his keys, it helps people make concrete choices based on the perception of their own skills and abilities. I have found it to be a very effective “re-energizer” within congregations.

It involves an evening and full day of walking through the “keys” and evaluating a congregation’s strengths relative to those keys. Then, having determined where the congregation’s best strengths lie, an objective plan is created based on the best ideas present in that planning group for building upon what the congregation has shown they can do well. This requires capable enablement from the planning workshop leader, but the result is a brief, clear, concrete plan with timelines set and persons responsible for action named to help the plan take shape and move forward. Annual evaluation assesses where success has been achieved and where the next year’s energies need to be focused.

Idea!

I’m worried that the questions being posed are a bit “yesterday.” We think we can become more “popular” by tweaking...by shuffling the deckchairs on the Titanic. I think we can do a little bit in that regard, but shuffling the deckchairs doesn’t change the course of the ship!

A re-visioning process is helpful, and there are many resources for engaging in this process. However, the re-visioning process should not be about “how do we fill the pews.” It should be about, “Who are we, and what in the name of God do we have to offer to the world?” But, if this process is done radically and authentically, it *will* likely “alarm your traditional base,” since it may well mean that the congregation will be doing things for different reasons and in different ways.

Many congregations are engaged in re-visioning and fiddling with their worship services and their music. However, if we look at the overall statistics within The Presbyterian Church in Canada, from 1997 to 2007, membership dropped from 143,784 to 116,374 and average attendance at communion slipped from 81,299 to 72,419. It’s not working!

I think that there are a couple of areas where congregations can be more faithful to their mission - areas that may encourage some growth:

- The practice of hospitality - truly welcoming people into our churches. This can be accomplished in many ways, but two excellent resources are Andrew Weeks' *The Magnetic Church* and Gary McIntosh's *Beyond the First Visit*. However, even the practice of hospitality requires a change of attitude and a change of culture in most churches.
- Serving the community. Members of the church can look around their community and ask themselves, "How, in the name of Christ, can we serve this community?" That can have many different faces - teen drop-in, senior drop-in, ESL, babysitting services for single moms, latchkey kids, or a food bank. The possibilities are endless. Every community is in need of services. If we simply give of ourselves in abundance and generosity, thankful children of an abundant and generous God, we can ease the burden in the lives of women and men whom God loves. However, once again, in most churches this will require a change in culture.

After these two things are done and done well, the congregation might look at moving forward in other ways. But maybe if it does these two things well, it won't have to be doing anything else. Perhaps doing an excellent job of welcoming and serving the people God loves is all that is required of the church.

Idea!

We recommend a focus on excellence in worship and worship renewal. The church lives to praise God, to do this well, and to make this our main focus as a church. In our experience, a focus on worship leads to spiritual renewal, which changes lives and makes people "hate to miss church!" With that attitude, people will be excited and encouraged about what is going on in their lives and congregation. Word will spread. This might mean new things in worship - or perhaps, a return to some old traditions of faith. Pay attention to worship space. Is it inviting and fresh? Are there meaningful visual symbols? Provide excellence in the materials used in worship and worship space - banners, visuals, handouts, and liturgies. Prayer is essential; open the church for "Days of Prayer" and offer guides with specific things to pray for. Cultivate a culture of discipleship. We are "apprentices of Jesus" learning to live with him and live like him. Arrange meetings of session to be more worshipful in their format and conduct. Celebrate every success, every opportunity to rejoice! Do something in the community without remuneration or expectation - just to give. And do it again and again. Ask: what would be helpful in this community?

We found these resources helpful: Lay Witness weekend events, Calvin College Institute of Christian Worship, Center for Excellence in Preaching, *Transforming Church Boards* by Charles Olson, *In Dying We Are Born* by Peter Bush, Alban Institute, *Discovering Hope* materials. (While designed for rural churches, several city churches have used these principles as they seek change and growth.)

2. How do we approach the unchurched without alarming long-time members?

Idea!

Discover the real needs of the community and begin to build ministry based on how the church can meet those needs. Help the congregation to understand and begin to feel a burden for the people in the community. Look outside worship for ways to connect meaningfully with the community. As leadership establishes the biblical values of ministry and community, determine where the current values of the church (spoken or unspoken) are not aligned with that and work with the

congregation to adjust. In our experience, there have been some people who stopped attending our church because it was moving away from what they wanted. There are many others, though, who have placed the value of embracing people from the community over their own preferences of comfort and familiarity, even though this hasn't necessarily been easy for them.

Idea!

The phrase that caught my attention was “without alarming our traditional base.” That speaks volumes. In some ways, this is an unwritten but much believed mission statement. Growth cannot happen without change, and change is not easy. The traditional base must be challenged to be about mission, to be about serving instead of being served, and to show compassion even when it costs their comfort. This isn't to say that the traditional base doesn't matter. Without a genuine change in this unwritten but very real agenda, all other efforts will flounder. This can't be about keeping the church going, saving our building, our “club,” or keeping the status quo. As St. Francis prayed, seek to understand rather than be understood...it is in dying that we are born. I speak from experience here. Our congregation has grown and changed so much because they knew they were dying and said so, and were willing to be challenged and changed by the Spirit. Their turnaround began with a focus on excellence in worship and spiritual renewal. Over years, the congregational culture has changed.

Idea!

Invite the younger people to become part of the church's Praise Team to give them opportunity to use their music skills (voice or playing an instrument). They will not only learn and play contemporary music, but may also come to see the value of the *Book of Praise*.

The “traditional base” can begin to see themselves as ministers of the gospel. They need to see that they will have to sacrifice in order to help new people connect with God. The language of sacrifice can be helpful, because it can lead to the more traditional ones seeing that they are voluntarily giving something up that is important to them in order for someone else to have a relationship with God. How to approach spiritually hungry younger people is a difficult question to answer. The only concrete suggestion I can give is to start something new for them rather than expecting them to just show up to what you are already doing. This might be a new worship service, but it could be something within worship, or an evening event of some kind. If you are trying to reach younger people in the community, start by asking the younger people what they would bring their friends to.

Idea!

We have approached our neighbours and surrounding community by hosting a few events every year through invitation (e.g., a newsletter or signs). For example, we hold a monthly community lunch co-hosted with a neighbouring Anglican church. This is a great way to meet people in the neighbourhood and to establish a relationship. We have NO agenda for this community lunch other than getting to know our neighbours.

If there are newer (and younger) people coming to your church, I would try to introduce storytelling. Ask some of the members (older and younger) to share their stories. This will help the new arrivals to understand the history of the church. It will also help the older members realize that they are still valued. Do an online search for “Constructing your congregation's story,” a free resource by James Wind. Look on the Alban Institute website (www.alban.org) for “Storytelling” or “Narrative Leadership” for additional resources.

Idea!

My experience is that the younger generations are moved to action by deeds of compassion and opportunities for community. Therefore, appealing to these folk at the level of missional and serv-

ice projects to improve and sustain healthy communities is an effective way to let them see the gospel at work. In “doing the mission, we see Christ.” For some, the worship of God comes first, and then service follows. But more and more in our time, people feel compelled to give of their human heart and spirit. In experiencing the transformation in others’ lives, they begin to see the heart of God in their activities, turning them back to the need for spiritual nourishment through the church’s ministry.

3. Is it true that music, not doctrine, defines Protestant congregations today? If so, how does that affect what we do?

Idea!

I’m not sure how true this statement about music, doctrine and defining boundaries is, but music is one way of connecting people with the presence of God. Our approach is to make this meaningful and relevant for the people who are joining in worship. This means that we are intentional about helping people understand what is being communicated through the words (understandable language), and we incorporate styles of music that create an environment of praise and adoration of God (instrumentation, time and space). True worship involves spirit and truth, and we place a high priority on doctrine within music.

The church will continue to struggle with styles of music - the debate between hymns and songs, and the preference of organ or band - as long as there is a perceived right way. The most beautiful expression of music within the church would be to recognize that music is a gift from God, and that all expressions are valid when people genuinely focus on God.

Music adjusts from culture to culture. In the New Testament, Paul is the greatest example of someone who contextualized his ministry according to the people he was speaking to. He never changed the message, but he creatively adjusted to speak in a way that the people understood, taking parts of their culture and incorporating that into his way of communicating. There is truth that we can view music as evangelism and that people can be drawn to God through music.

Idea!

I’m not sure music is the defining boundary! One of the fastest growing denominations is Greek Orthodox, which uses mainly chants. It’s important to listen to what people are listening to and the questions they are asking. There’s lots of great music of all styles. Choose carefully and wisely. Authenticity counts. Guitars and drums will not bring and keep people in church. I say that as one who plays both. It is important to figure out who God is calling you to be and have music speak to that faith, mission and conviction.

Idea!

Find or create a venue where different Protestant congregations can try out new music and may learn from one another. The Praise Team should not be a “performing group,” but members should understand the meaning of worship. It is about honouring God.

Idea!

I don't think it is true that music defines the boundaries among Protestants today. I'm not sure it is doctrine either. It seems that many people are seeking an experience of God, and tools to under-

stand their experience. This can be expressed through participation in music, but is also found in other parts of worship, and also through community, service, giving, prayer and other people.

Idea!

I think it's important to have worship leaders who understand their role to be teachers and not performers. A choir director needs to be able to teach the congregation how to use their voices to worship God. I'm not sure why, but often we come to church and want to be passive and watch the choir "perform." The post-modern generation wants to participate. They desire worship to be interactive. They like to be taught new hymns. They like hearing music from different traditions (Taizé, Iona) or cultures (African-American spirituals, blues). A church can still have traditional hymns and have the choir sing an anthem, but vary things up. Play a hymn on a piano, acoustic guitar, and flute instead of an organ. This takes more work and usually requires volunteers, but the payoff can be huge. The music in worship can really bring people (old and young) together.

Idea!

We simply have to deal with "the music issue." The music decision casts the mould. Period. Go contemporary if you wish, but do it well. Go traditional if you wish, but do it well. The problem is usually that we do contemporary poorly or traditional poorly or blended poorly. Know that people will go where they feel loved and where the music speaks to their soul. What's wrong is to proclaim that whichever way we choose to go is the only way forward!

4. How do we avoid pitfalls in introducing contemporary worship?

Idea!

Avoid the pitfall of changing everything abruptly with no warning. Even though there will be some who are eager to have a new way, it's important to recognize that this will be difficult for others. Validate their grief and loss and encourage them to see why things need to change. Invite them to be part of the bigger picture - helping to cast the vision and communicate carefully to others. Help everyone to be in a position of respect for each other. Avoid the pitfall of assuming what alternative worship looks like.

We would perceive it a pitfall to assume that alternative worship means that the congregation needs to become divided with different styles of worship. It may be valid for some churches to have two services, one traditional and the other contemporary, but we strongly sensed that it was not the right way for us. In our congregation, we have two services (9:00 and 11:00) that are exactly the same.

Avoid the pitfall of assuming that changing the worship style will change the impact of the church on the community. We have found that there are many other things that need attention if we are going to be a church where people are drawn to seek and find God.

Idea!

Avoid moving too fast in trying new things without first doing the hard groundwork about faith, call, prayer, mission, authenticity and discipleship. Don't think that _____ will solve the decline (fill in the blank: guitars, drums, PowerPoint, no robes, robes, etc.) Avoid doing something because it's what everyone else is doing, instead of discerning what God, what the Spirit is saying

to your congregation. Avoid assuming people know stuff - like the Creed, the Lord's Prayer. Worship and the worship space need to be user-friendly - but not "dumbed down."

New people will sense desperation and panic right away. Most people get a sense of the spirit of a congregation within the first few minutes of being there. That's why spiritual renewal, worship renewal is a first priority

Avoid trying to make everybody happy all the time. Avoid focusing on money first (either as the problem or the solution) instead of faith and discipleship.

Idea!

Always have the session on board in planning a new "ministry" within the congregation.

Idea!

I'm not sure how to answer that question. I am not a big believer that a congregation should stay with one worship service for the sake of community. Many congregations already behave, not as a single group, but as many groups. Sometimes it might be better to provide multiple worship opportunities for the sake of helping other people develop their relationship with God, if that is the number one priority. There is one major pitfall that I think should be avoided if a new worship service is started or a new form of worship is introduced. Do not do it unless it is going to be top quality the first time. It is better to wait and get it right than to have the congregation experience experimentation where the leaders do not seem to know what they are doing. The new thing needs to be experienced in a positive way.

Idea!

I think that some churches think that a "praise band" is the answer to a declining congregation. I think pop Christian music can be self-centred and quite shallow in theological meaning. It would be a shame if our younger generation never got to experience a Taize service or music from the Iona community. When traditional hymns are re-traditioned for our context by playing them with a variety of instruments (guitar, piano, drums), and this is done well, it can be a nice alternative to the "praise band." There are advantages to using alternative song books such as *Sing With Me*. If you have an opportunity to attend a workshop by John Bell (Iona Community), take it!

Idea!

I believe that the best way to add an alternative worship service is to place it on a different day altogether than the current Sunday service and even consider moving it outside of the church facilities. It must be seen to be an entirely different animal than the current worship offering. There will still be some inevitable conflicts, but they will be more manageable. An even better approach would be to offer two other worship possibilities, thereby assuring that there is a three-cell dynamic at play which is much more manageable than a two-cell framework.

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When Children Forget How to Behave

Writers: David Phillips, Dorothy Henderson, Mabel Williamson



In church school, as in public schools, those of us who teach must often deal with “misbehaviour” or “discipline.” This is particularly difficult in Sunday school, Vacation Bible schools and camps, because we want to model the example of Christ, and we also want children to enjoy coming to our programmes.

There are many occasions when children forget how to behave - something we describe as misbehaviour. (Let’s face it! Youth and adults forget how to behave at times, as well.)

Sometimes we can prevent behaviour problems within our church programs by being proactive instead of reactive.

Follow these suggestions:

- The teacher should be mobile.

- Especially in classes where children are under eight years of age, there should be two adults.
- Keep constant visual and verbal contact with the group.
- Use variety in activities.
- Always have the class set up before the children arrive.
- Model good behaviour.
- Be positive at all times.
- Do not ignore disruptive or negative behaviour, hoping it will go away.
- Be a good communicator.
- Be friendly, open and accessible.
- Be sure to follow the principles and suggestions in *Leading with Care*, our denominational policy for protection of children. **Whenever possible, have two adults in a learning situation.**

Be liberal in using the game “How do we act at...” Provide examples: hockey games, when *O Canada* is being sung, when a funny movie is on TV, when Grandma is telling us something, when prayers are said in church. Include in this game church school activities. Always do the teaching *before* you need the actions.

Despite this constructive approach, problems may arise. Here are suggestions for handling various situations.

Issue #1: You have a high-spirited group.

When you observe, at the beginning, that there are a lot of high-energy children in your group, it is helpful to make a group covenant. (Even if you don’t have a high-spirited group, this is a helpful practice.) On a chart, list things that are important to help the group function well. Here are some examples: We will arrive on time. We will not call each other names. We will try to help each other. We will not speak when someone else is speaking. These suggestions should come from the children, and if one child suggests something, check with the others that there is agreement. Try to keep the covenant simple. There should never be more than five or six “rules.”

It may be that you will want to think of a consequence if the covenant is violated. Ask the children: What should we do if someone forgets how to act? Try to make the consequence positive and helpful. For instance, rather than say, “Latecomers should sit outside the group for five minutes,” suggest that a group member could work with the latecomer to be more organized in order to arrive on time.

Issue #2: A child is disorganized.

Ask the child to perform one task at a time. The younger the children, the shorter the task should be. Put a sticker or picture showing where scissors, glue, paper go. This helps all the children and avoids pointing out the disorganization of one child.

Issue #3: A small child does not respond appropriately to common words such as stop, yes, no.

Teach the language before you need it. Create a game that all the children can play. For instance, go on a jungle prowl and creep among imaginary trees and step over vines. Say, “Oh, there is a big river ahead.

We must...” Hold up a stop sign and have the children call out “stop.” Continue your journey and pause to say “stop” several more times - as you look at a beautiful valley, step carefully over slippery rocks, or wash your hands in a river. When children hear the word “stop” in your classroom, they will remember to stop their activity until instructions are given to move on.



Issue #4: A child needs verbal instructions and questions repeated.

Give an instruction that involves only one step. Ask questions that have only one idea. Before asking the question or giving the instruction, use the child’s name: “Richard, will you please pass along the crayons?” If you give an instruction, ask the child to repeat it: “Richard, I’m wondering if you heard what I told everyone to do with the yellow paper.”

Remember that all children learn in different ways, as do adults. Some need to see the instructions. Some need to hear them. Some like to see a finished product and figure things out on their own. Some need to act out a story, some listen quietly and imagine it in their head. Some need to draw the main parts. For each activity, provide a choice of methods. Each child will instinctively lean toward their own best method. The role of the teacher is to observe and make sure children have the tools they need to do their best learning.

Issue #5: A child has difficulty concentrating.

When speaking or giving instructions, use pictures, diagrams, chalkboard or gestures to hold the child's attention. If giving instructions, make them short and precise. Establish a learning area where there are minimal distractions. If instructions are printed, keep them simple.

Issue #6: A child does not seem to hear or respond well to verbal directions.

Use the least number of words necessary to give directions. (It is helpful to record yourself and listen to the recording.) We may think that we speak simply and clearly, but when we listen to ourselves, we often find that we use ten words when five will do.)

If you are giving out materials, give verbal directions before the material is handed out.

Use simple vocabulary and match it to the child's level of understanding.

Issue #7: A child does not listen when other students are speaking.

Children may *appear* to not be listening when another child or the teacher is speaking, but they often are hearing and taking in information. If you want to check out whether a child is listening, try this. Say, "I want to tell you something. Pretend that you are an echo and, when I'm done, you can say it back to me." Design activities where children must work co-operatively to complete a task while listening to each other. For instance, invite children to draw a co-operative picture of Jesus and the children. Instruct one child to tell the other how to start the picture by saying, "Draw a green hill in the background." Then have the children switch places. Ask the second child to say, "Draw Jesus sitting near the hill," and so on.

Issue #8: A child does not read independently.

Children do not begin to read at the same speed. It is entirely possible to find a third grade student who is still not reading well. Encourage interest in reading by having students share interesting things they have read. Make sure the student is reading material on his/her ability level. (Consult with the child's parent for help with this.) Be careful about Bible reading. The NRSV Bible is written at a Grade 7+ level, while *The Message* is the easiest for Grades 4-5. If a child is younger than nine, it is wise to use a story Bible such as *The Family Story Bible*, by Ralph Milton (Wood Lake Books). If you notice that a child has a particular





interest, find resources in that area that are written at an easy level. Sometimes large print resources can be less intimidating.

Issue #9: A child does not get tasks done during the time allotted.

When this happens repeatedly, make sure that you are giving directions or instructions before handing out materials. This enables the child to get straight down to the task. Be sure that the assignment or task is presented in an attractive and interesting manner.

Issue #10: A child does not want to work independently.

Some children simply do not enjoy working alone on projects. Ask yourself: Why am I expecting this child to work alone? If it is important, give encouraging comments to the child as they work independently.

Issue #11: A child does not read or follow written directions.

Provide simple written instructions or pictures presented at the child's reading level. Be consistent in these instructions, always using the same pattern, such as step 1, step 2, etc. Here is an example:

Making colour resist pictures

Step 1: Draw a picture with crayons.

Step 2: Lightly brush with black paint over the picture.

The areas of crayon will resist the black paint.

Issue #12: A child becomes physically aggressive with teachers.

We may not think that this could happen within the church, but unfortunately it does. The best approach is to prevent this from happening. As a teacher, you should move a great deal. Stand where the children can see your eyes, and you can see theirs. If a child forgets how to act appropriately, a time-out chair might work. Ask the parent/guardian for advice about how they handle a similar situation. Observe activities that make a child uncomfortable, and avoid those things in the future. Teach all the children ways to express themselves when they are angry or frustrated - slow, calm speaking or walking around the area before they speak. You can also provide a "quiet corner" where children can go voluntarily to think things through. (See suggestions, also, in Issue #15.)

Issue #13: A child makes inappropriate comments to teacher.

If a child is angry or displeased, s/he might make inappropriate comments to the teacher. If this happens, give the child words to say that are more helpful. For instance, say to the child, "I want you to say to me, could we talk about this after class?" or "Teacher, I need to talk to you." Avoid saying things like, "That comment really hurt my feelings," or "That statement makes me angry." If this issue occurs more than once, be sure that the child and parent are both informed of the situation. You might also use hand signs to show the children when comments are inappropriate; e.g., put up your hand in a stop signal, touch your ear, etc.

Issue #14: A child responds to praise or recognition by being boisterous, overly assertive or bragging.

Older children, especially, may respond to praise or recognition in active ways - by punching their friends, giggling, moving a great deal or waving their arms. They enjoy the recognition even though they often look as if they don't. To avoid this type of behaviour, you may choose to distribute praise and recognition equally to everyone. Or, if you want to individually encourage a child, write a note.

Issue #15: A child is easily angered, annoyed or upset.

Be sure to talk with the parent or the person who brings the child to church. Are there things that happen at home before coming to church? Depending on the age of the child, you might suggest some of these things: engage the child in laying out his/her clothes for church on Saturday evening; enjoy a slow leisurely breakfast with some fun activity like colouring at the breakfast table or special pancakes; declare Sunday morning a no-cartoon, no-TV time since children often hate to be interrupted from cartoons. Allow the child to wear comfortable clothes and shoes. In the class, maintain a positive, calm environment. Give children choices. For instance, say, "After the story, you may work at the painting easels or build a biblical house with Lego."

Teach children a five-step pattern if they feel angry:

1. Breathe. Breathe deeply and slowly five in-and-out breaths.
2. Feel. Identify where you feel your anger - in the stomach, neck, chest?
3. Notice. Say to yourself, "Yes, I'm feeling angry."
4. Relax. Move your shoulders up and down. Roll your neck. Wiggle your arms.
5. Think. Decide what you choose to do to handle the situation in a good way.





Issue #16: A child does not seem to enjoy interacting with peers.

If this happens, find other children who seem to be closest to this child. If you notice that there are certain situations where the child does interact, try to set up those circumstances. To avoid leaving one child alone, form groups or pairs by picking colours of paper, or using birth months or animals. As children grow older, boys often want to work with boys and girls with girls. They are usually quite vocal in making their wishes known.

Issue #17: A child does not share with others.

This happens more frequently with young children. Encourage children to take turns. If both want a particular toy, put on a minute timer for three or four minutes and tell the children that, when the timer goes off, it is time for the child to give the toy to another. If possible, provide enough materials and activities so that taking turns will not always be necessary.

Issue #18: A child is not accepted by other children.

Do everything you can to avoid competition and criticism. If you are always correcting a child, the other children will pick that up and repeat your behaviour. If possible, help the child develop a friendship by carefully pairing him or her with another child.

Issue #19: A child does not participate or show interest in activities in the room.

Give the child responsibility - helping someone, tidying, fetching supplies. Encourage the child to share things of special interest with others. Make positive comments about participating in church events.

Issue #20: A child expresses concerns or worries about school, home or personal situations.

This is a difficult issue and should be handled with extreme care. If a child expresses a concern or worry about a personal issue, it is good to simply listen. It is likely that it is beyond your control and is a bigger issue than you can deal with in church school time. Talk with a reliable person about whether or not you should share the information with the parent/guardian.

Issue #21: A child indicates that no one cares about him/her.

Take time to listen so the child realizes your concern and interest. Give the child responsibility in group situations so other children may view the child in a positive way.

Issue #22: A child does not smile, laugh or demonstrate happiness.

Some children are just naturally more sober than others, so do not read too much into this. You may want to observe the parents, who also may be sober people. If so, this child has this in his/her genes! Take time to talk with the child individually to discern if the child is unhappy or is just a naturally sober per-

son. Sometimes children are shy or uncertain of themselves in a particular setting, and this makes them appear sombre or even moody.

Issue #23: A child throws temper tantrums.

Young children (usually ages one to three) may throw a temper tantrum (lie on the floor, kick, scream, hold their breath) when they are hungry, tired or frustrated. If possible, prevent situations that stimulate temper tantrums. Ask the parent/guardian about how they effectively handle the child who throws a tantrum. Try the following prevention strategies. Give the child positive attention. Establish the habit of catching the child being good. Give young children control over little things - ask questions like this: "Would you like the blue truck or the red ball?" If there are off-limits objects in your class area, remove them. Use distraction - replace a new activity for a frustrating or forbidden one. Change the environment by directing the child to another space.

The best response to a temper tantrum is to keep cool. Take deep breaths and try to think clearly. Do not hit or spank. Try to understand what's going on. Tantrums may need to be handled differently for various situations. When a child throws a tantrum being refused something, do not try to reason. You may ignore the tantrum if it poses no threat to the child or others. Continue your activities, paying no attention to the child, but remain within sight. If children might hurt themselves or others during a tantrum, they should be taken to a quiet, safe place to calm down.

If older children have a tantrum, they should be sent off by themselves until they have regained control. Do **not** reward a child after a tantrum. This will only prove to the child that the tantrum was effective. Instead, verbally praise a child for regaining control.

Issue #24: A child becomes overexcited.

If you notice that a child is becoming overexcited, steer the child to a calmer activity. Remain calm yourself. Provide children with a predetermined signal reminding them that they need to calm themselves. For young children, designate a comfortable chair in your class as the "cuddle chair." When children need to calm down, suggest a visit to the cuddle chair. (Add soft stuffed animals.) With older chil-

dren, create a "Freeze" game. Call out instructions like these: "Stand tall," "Touch toes three times," "Reach for the sky," "Sit and relax." End with "Freeze." The children will learn, after several repetitions, that "Sit and relax" ends with "Freeze" and will become more adept at calming themselves. (Alternately, you could call this game, "Be calm" instead of "Freeze.")

Issue #25: A child lies, denies, exaggerates or distorts the truth.

This happens! Young children (ages four and older) often make up stories and tell tall tales. This is normal activity because it is fun. Young children often blur the distinction between reality and fantasy. Older children may distort the truth for a number of reasons. They may want to escape punishment. They may be imitating another child or an adult. They may need a self-esteem boost.

It is important, as teachers and role models, that we never tell a "little white lie" ourselves. If you suspect that a child is repeatedly lying, talk with him or her about the importance of truthfulness, honesty and trust. Ask, "Is this make believe or reality?"





Issue #26: A child reacts in fear.

Especially for young children, fear is a big problem, because their frame of reference is quite limited and they cannot use rational powers to diffuse their fear. Bear in mind that fear has a healthy side. Fear of heights protects us from falling. A fear of bees can remind us to avoid being stung. Don't make fun of the child's fear. That will make them more fearful. Gradually expose the child to the thing s/he is fearful of. For instance, if you know that a guest clown is frightening to a child, seat the child next to you. Invite the clown to come close wearing ordinary clothes and carrying the clown suit. Ask the clown to put on the suit near the children. Ask, "Would you like the clown to put on her green hair?" If a fearful child says no, wait until the next week, repeat the process, and ask again, gradually adding hair and makeup.

Issue #27: A child does not follow rules for the class or church.

With older children, spend some time at the start of your program year to write together a class contract entitled *How we want to be when we're together*. Invite children to contribute ideas like these: We will not make fun of each other. We will not call each other names. We will not run, because we might bump older members. We will not speak when someone else is speaking, etc. For younger children, post two or three simple rules with pictures and repeat them as needed: We will share. We will be kind to others. We will be quiet when others are thinking about God or praying.

Conclusion

The same root word is used in "discipline" and "disciple." What does this tell us? That, as Christian teachers and leaders, it is our responsibility and privilege to help children grow in learning how to be disciples of Christ.

Watch Your Language—Talking about Money

Calvin and the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper
Session Starter #17

What's on Your Mind?

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August 2009

Watch Your Language— Talking about Money

The Rev. Don Muir, Deputy Clerk, General Assembly Office

Have you ever been told to watch your language? Such a command may have been followed by the threat, "I'll wash your mouth out with soap!" Images of some poor child foaming at the mouth for uttering a vulgar word or two come to mind, but I've never actually witnessed the punishment meted out. This article is not a Miss Manners column on what constitutes polite language, but an exploration into the sort of language that could be used when discussing financial support in a congregation. While finding a helpful method and appropriate time to discuss finances with a congregation is important (see the May 2009 Equipping for...Elders), finding the right words might be just as important.

In his book *Effective Church Finances* (chapter 8), Kennon Callahan argues that financial communication to the congregation should be prepared from the perspective of the giver rather than from the perspective of the treasurer, Board of Managers, or Finance and Maintenance Committee. This is because treasurers and other financial people are inclined to use technical terms. They may refer to money received as receipts, revenues or income.

Callahan suggests something else. He writes, "Help people to know by the words you use, the perspective you have, and the theology you hold that you are focusing on the congregation's giving, not the finance committee's income and receipts."



Callahan focuses on the congregation's giving. He calls financial targets "Giving Goals." He calls financial updates "Giving Reports." In a written report, he would use a heading such as "Contributions this past month" or "Given this past month" instead of "Receipts." In fact, Callahan strongly urges those in charge of finances to avoid words like "received" or "receipts" that put the emphasis on the board or committee that handles funds.

For example, a treasurer might announce to the congregation, "The Board of Managers' income

Watch Your Language— Talking about Money (continued)

goal for January was \$5,000. We are delighted to announce that we not only reached that goal but surpassed it, raising \$5,500.” According to Callahan, that would be like a coach saying to the team, “I am happy to announce, as coach, that I won the game.” It would be much more effective if a treasurer announced something like, “Our giving goal for January was \$5,000. We are grateful that the congregation surpassed this target and gave \$5,500 this month. This is a caring and generous congregation. Well done!”

Callahan adds, “An important point to note here: people do not quit giving when we get ahead on our giving goal, but people do hold back in their giving when someone else takes credit for what they are doing. All reports need to recognize the offerings are generously donated by the congregation. The congregation needs to be thanked regularly for what they have done well.”

Callahan also recommends that money received from other sources, such as investments or GST rebates, should be listed separately. This recognizes and honours the stewardship of the people who financially support the ministry of Christ in a community of faith.

Similarly, instead of referring to debits, expenses or disbursements, it might be more constructive to communicate money spent in terms of gifts invested. A financial presentation might sound like this: “This year we have invested \$2,000 in the Christian Education of the children of our congregation, \$3,000 in Christian Camping, \$4,000 in the work of Presbyterian World Service & Development, and so on. This language conveys clearly that it is the congregation that is actively supporting and empowering ministry through gifts.

Whether or not a congregation refers to “Giving Goals” or how we “invest” the gifts of the congregation, it is important to communicate clearly where the offerings are being used and how they are fulfilling our discipleship by ministering to the needs of the congregation, the community in which the congregation is located, and the world beyond. As often as possible, we ought to talk about the people who are helped by the money we give. Pictures are worth a thousand words. Congregations with PowerPoint capabilities can prepare wonderful presentations on the ministries being supported. People tend to respond well when needs are known and positive differences are being made. Or as Callahan puts it, “People give money to a winning cause, not a sinking ship.”

John Calvin: His Life & Legacy

Review of *John Calvin: His Life & Legacy*

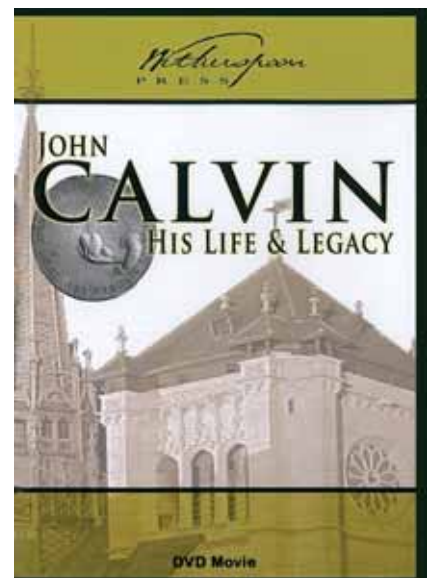
Reviewed by: Dorothy Henderson

Producer: Witherspoon Press, 2009

John Calvin: His Life & Legacy is an hour-long documentary on the life and theological importance of John Calvin. The life of John Calvin is told amidst some stunning photography from Dordrecht and Geneva. World-renowned scholars and Reformed church leaders comment on Calvin’s effect on the church and the whole course of Western civilization.

This video is a good choice for a serious study group, a clergy group and theological students.

Purchase this DVD from The Book Room (\$35.00) or it may be borrowed from the Video Library for a handling fee of \$6.00.



Calvin and the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

Session Starter #17

Prayer

God of immeasurable bounty, you have blessed creation with the Bread of Life. Help us to be nourished by our walk with Christ. You have blessed creation with the True Vine. Help us to be sustained by the spirit of Christ flowing into our hearts and souls. In the name of our saviour we pray. Amen.

Introduction

The session determines the appointed times and provides for the administration of the sacraments.

Book of Forms 111.1

Scripture

...the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

A Brief Commentary

In this portion of his letter to the Corinthians, Paul addresses the divisions that had fractured this Christian community, as well as the manner by which the Corinthians dishonoured the Lord's Supper. Paul reminds them that this holy and covenantal meal unites believers in Christ and in his ministry of reconciliation, justice and truth.

Reflection

This year marks the 500th anniversary of the birth of John Calvin. In Session Starter Number 16 (May 2009), I noted some of Calvin's comments on baptism. This time we touch on just a bit of what Calvin had to say about the Lord's Supper in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, first published in 1536. (For an online version of the "Institutes," see www.reformed.org/master/index.html?mainframe=/books/institutes)

Calvin describes how the Lord's Supper fits into our faith journey. The journey begins with baptism and continues as we find ourselves adopted by God and serving as brothers and sisters with Christ in the church. We are continually and spiritually nourished through this sacrament.

"First, then, the signs are bread and wine, which represent the invisible food which we receive from the body and blood of Christ. For as God, regenerating us in baptism, ingrafts us into the fellowship of his Church, and makes us his by adoption, so we have said that he performs the office of a provident parent, in continually supplying the food by which he may sustain and preserve us in the life to which he has begotten us by his word" (Chapter XVII, 1).

Drawing upon the example of the scriptures, such as Acts 2:41, Calvin further maintains that Christians, at a minimum, ought to be nourished in this manner once a week rather than once a year as was so often the custom in those days.

"Each week, at least, the table of the Lord ought to have been spread for the company of Christians, and the promises declared on which we might then spiritually feed" (Chapter XVII, 46).

Discussion

1. How does Calvin's view of the Lord's Supper compare to ours?
2. By what creative ways might we express more deeply the extraordinary spiritual truth and blessing behind the ordinary loaf of bread and the cup?

What's On Your Mind?

What happens when a term-service elder's term comes to an end?

For most of the history of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, eldership was considered to be a lifelong call. Naturally, an elder could seek permission to resign at any time, take a leave of absence if s/he needed a temporary break from the demands of this office, or even be deposed or suspended through a disciplinary process. Nevertheless, it was generally understood that once elected, the elder would serve as long as s/he was able.

Sessions, for several years now, have had another option. They can continue with the "life service" model or opt for the "term service" model. (See Book of Forms sections 108 to 108.3) According to information gleaned from the 2007 statistical report forms completed by congregations, approximately 180 sessions are now employing term service. These sessions range in size from one elder to 37 elders.

Under the term service model, elders are still ordained for life, but serve on session for a term of six years at a time. There is no prescribed method of initiating the rotation system. Sessions have found creative ways of making the transition from life to term service. Ultimately, every two years, one third of the session fulfils its term and an election process takes place.

At this point in the process, sessions are sometimes tempted to do two things.

1. Some sessions insist that elders who finish their term take a one-year sabbatical before they can be re-elected. This is contrary to the polity that states elders "may stand for re-election at the end of each term." At the first election after the elder's term ends, the elder who has just left the session is as

eligible as any other member of the congregation to be elected to the session. Of course, an elder may choose not to have his/her name placed on the ballot.

2. Some sessions think those who finish their term don't need to be re-elected - that if the elders are willing to serve again, they are simply placed on the session again and another six-year term begins. Our polity states that they must be re-elected. This honours the discernment process of having a congregation confirm an elder's call to service. The elder, if re-elected, returns to the session with the confidence that the congregation continues to recognize his/her gifts for this ministry at this chapter in its history, and supports him/her.

Blessings,
Don Muir
Associate Secretary
General Assembly Office

What's on your mind?

Do you have a question about the polity of our church? Are you confused by something that happened at session, presbytery, synod, or General Assembly? Puzzling over a section of the *Book of Forms*?

Send your questions to The Rev. Don Muir and he will strive to answer them in future issues of *Equipping for . . . Elders* in a manner that maintains confidentiality and seeks to be helpful to the church at large.

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