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Congregational Life

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Multiplying Congregational Leaders

by Edward A. White

Alban consultant Edward White's column in the fall issue of Congregations dealt with leadership and the shortage of capable clergy. We got his permission to share it.

Q: We keep hearing that there is a growing shortage of capable clergy. Why are so many clergy burning out, dropping out, retiring as soon as possible, or shifting to doing interim ministry? And why aren't more bright young people coming into the ministry?

A: Clergy are burning out and/or dropping out for several reasons. Over the years, most mainline Protestant traditions have drifted into a model of congregational life that is overly clergy-centered and clergy dependent to the point where, for some people, the success of the congregation depends entirely on the clergy. That is a heavy burden for clergy to carry.

In addition, in our consumer-minded society, many people believe it is the task of the pastor to keep everybody happy all of the time. Rabbi Edwin Friedman said the typical Protestant congregation consists of an overfunctioning pastor surrounded by infantilized laity. This is a perfect recipe for burnout. Small wonder that young adults are not attracted to such a ministry.

Actually, there are many young adults going into the ministry, but many of them are not coming into the traditional mainline denominations. Instead, many young clergy are starting independent "emerging congregations" to serve the 20 to 35 age group. They believe that being connected to existing traditional denominations would inhibit and perhaps

even undermine their ministry because the traditional denominations reflect a modern worldview whereas the emerging generation reflects a postmodern worldview. *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Post Modern Cultures* by Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger (Baker Books, 2005) describes some 50 "emerging congregations" in the United States and Great Britain that have been started within the past 20 years, mostly by pastors under 35 for young adults under 35.

In most of the mainline congregations I work with, I find that the least represented generation is the 20 to 35 age



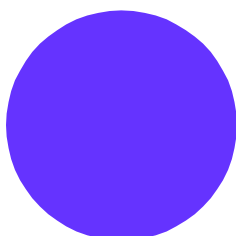
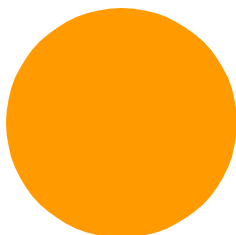
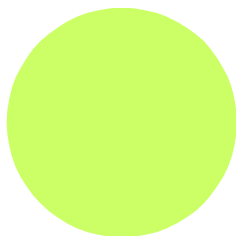
group. Older members who are in charge have difficulty understanding and/or communicating with the emerging generation. They want them to come to church, but they want them to accept things as they are and not try to change them. The younger generation has different priorities and thus concludes that

there is no room for them in established congregations.

The Christian church is always potentially one generation away from extinction and for many congregations this is a real possibility. Postmodern young adults are more concerned about relationships than ideology and they care more about authenticity than success. They don't see much resemblance between life in our established congregations and the actual teachings of Jesus.

Another dimension of the problem relates to the process used to prepare and credential candidates for the ministry.

Continued on page 2



Multiplying Leaders—continued

Seminaries are engulfed in the academic model and they do a fine job of teaching Bible, theology, church history, polity, and ethics. They don't, however, teach much about *leadership!* Many seminary faculty are academics who have never had to exercise leadership. Years ago, Daniel Goleman did research documenting that IQ is not the primary factor in effective leadership. His findings were that the key to leadership is something he calls "Emotional Intelligence," which is based on 18 intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies. Unlike IQ, which is a fixed figure, emotional intelligence is something that can be developed. Unfortunately, our seminaries are not geared to help candidates for the ministry develop their emotional intelligence. The result is that we produce clergy who are often very smart and can preach good sermons but lack the competencies (emotional intelligence) to be fruitful leaders.

To make matters worse, we have inherited a hierarchical model of pastoral leadership that tends to create dependency. Traditional leaders add followers to a congregation. Empowering leaders multiply leaders in a congregation. True leadership is a catalytic rather than a controlling function, but many clergy have not learned the art of empowerment. Too often our congregations are in the membership business instead of being in the disciple making business.

Is it too late to change? Not necessarily! How willing are we to be changed? If we are unwilling to be changed our congregations will remain the same. But we need not worry. If our congregations cannot reach and serve the emerging generation, God will raise up emerging congregations that will. The central concern is not to preserve our institutions but to seek the Kingdom.

Edward A. White is a senior consultant and seminar leader for the Alban Institute, with expertise in leadership development, strategic planning, and conflict management.

Reprinted with permission from *Congregations*, Fall 2006 issue, The Alban Institute newsletter.

Traditional leaders add followers to a congregation. Empowering leaders multiply leaders in a congregation.

Shaping Your Deep Gladness



A Prisms Study Guide for Small Groups

by Joyce Madsen

Shaping Your Deep Gladness *A Prisms Study Guide* *by Joyce Madsen*

Shaping is designed for participants in a small group who have a desire to identify their gifts and passions, understand them more deeply by sharing them, and as a result, shape their future.

It can be used for those who want to find a way of connecting with their congregation, for those who want to identify a new career, for anyone at a transition in their life, or just for the experience of becoming clearer about one's individual identity.

It is designed to be used for six, seven or eight sessions of your group. You will want to have a copy of *Shaping Your Deep Gladness* for each member of the group. Order a trial copy today.

Order from the
Congregational Life Centre
or your local bookstore.
\$14.95.

Turning Decline into Growth

By Clair Woodbury

The question we are asked most often at the Centre is “How do we turn our congregation’s numerical decline into growth?”

The answer, surprisingly enough, is a very simple three step process. I didn’t say it was easy, but it is simple:

1. Welcome people warmly.
2. Find out why they have come.
3. Then help them to find what they have come for.

We in the church do not do a very good job of welcoming people warmly. Where we really fall down, however, is in step two. Those of us who have been raised in a church based on committees and a highly structured organization too often make the mistake of assuming that people have come to become part of our organization. As a result we give them a few weeks to settle into a pew, then approach them to join this committee or teach Sunday School or usher – all activities to support our congregation’s current structure.

What we forget is that the x-generation (generally those born between 1963 and 1978) and the millennial generation (born 1982 – 2000) are not interested in being part of an industrial age organization. They are children of the communications era. It is people they are interested in, not perpetuating a structure. It is an experience of God in their lives they deeply long for, whether they can articulate that or not.

Find Why People Come

People do not come to our congregations because they happen to be wandering by the church on Sunday morning and drop in. They don’t come because they have nothing else to do with their time. Schedules today are hectic. People have more than enough entertainment, not to mention children’s hockey games and trips to the ski resort, to keep them occupied on Sunday morning.

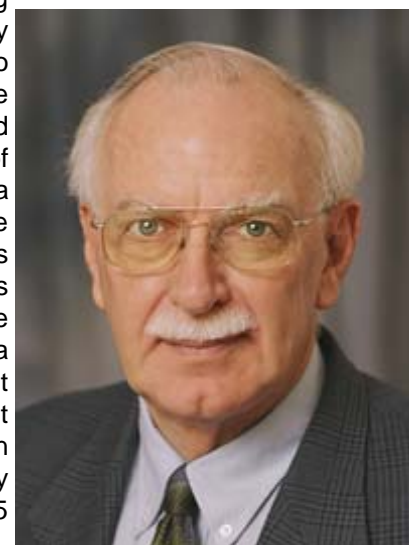
New people come to your congregation because they have a very specific reason for doing so. More often than not that reason is related to a transition in their life. One couple

walked into my congregation because they had just retired from work in a supermarket – he was the manager and she a cashier – and they were looking for a community to belong to. A young couple came because they wanted their children to be taught Christian ethical values. A single parent came because the church she was attending was not feeding her spiritually. She was looking for depth in her spiritual life and for colleagues on the journey. A number of young adults came because they were new in town attending a vocational college and were looking for a place to make contact with others their same age who were interested in discussing life issues.

The task is to find out why people have come, one person at a time. The question is not “Where in our organization would you like to plug in?” The question is the one every knowledgeable clerk asks when you walk into a store, “What can I help you find?”

Help them Find It

That brings us to the third aspect of growth – helping people find what they have come for. It meant introducing the retired supermarket manager and his wife to other couples in the congregation their same age, until they knew enough people to feel they were truly part of a worshipping community. It involved introducing the young couple to our Children’s Ministry coordinator, who took the time to walk them through our whole Christian education process and introduce the children to others of the same age. It meant starting a program for singles in the congregation, because that was what was needed for the singles as well as our new single parent. The young adults were invited for a spaghetti dinner and asked what they wanted to do. Their answer – sit around in someone’s living room on Sunday evening and talk. That they did, until there were as many as 25 each week.



(Continued on page 4)

What church are your grandchildren attending?

This third step requires an entrepreneurial spirit. When there is a need for something not available, it means taking the time to bring people together who have similar interests. How can a clergy do all this? The answer, they can't. Ministry staff who are successful today see themselves as having one primary task – and that is to identify, train and support the potential leadership that is in their congregation. They have one motivation – the same one we see in Jesus' ministry – a passion to let more people than they can personally reach know that God cares for them.

This means changing the way we clergy have traditionally operated. Worship is not a time when "the Minister" dominates centre stage. It is a time for training worship leadership. Bible study is not a place where clergy show off what they learned in seminary. It is a place where co-leaders are given the confidence to become leaders in their own right. Marriage preparation classes are not just about lessons in making a marriage work, but also a time to spot and encourage couples with leadership ability and to hone and make use of their gifts. Confirmation classes are not just about church membership. They are occasions to identify future leaders, to be followed up with the opportunities and the support they need to develop their leadership gifts.

Deal with the Opposition

One last word – maybe the most important. There will be opposition, usually from well meaning members of what we have come to call the "old guard." They are senior members of the congregation who were raised in the industrial era and tend to put buildings before building community, balancing the budget ahead of budgeting for growth. They work very hard to maintain a comfortable status quo, and work equally hard to resist any who would create the new wineskins that are required for new growth. There is no easy way – you have to deal with them head on. The question Matt Ziprick of Bethel Lutheran says he asks is simply, "And what church are your grandchildren attending?" All too often today the answer is "None." The church of the old guard is in rapid decline and will more than likely die with them. Personally, I want there to be a church in the future that not only attracts my

grandchildren because it communicates using their language but also provides for their personal and spiritual growth.

The answer is simple.

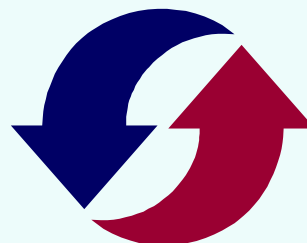
✦ A warm welcome.

✦ Find out why each person has come, because each person is unique and is there for a unique reason.

✦ Then meet that need.

It is not easy but the resulting growth will be worth it. We guarantee it.

By the way, that single parent is Joyce Madsen, now my staff team colleague at the Congregational Life Centre. When you meet people's needs, no telling where it will lead.



Think about bringing your faith up to date ...
... by spending five exciting days celebrating
the real world we live in.

Science and Religion in Dialogue

with
Clair Woodbury & Joyce Madsen

The God who intervenes has gone. The God who keeps us company while life is happening is alive and well. The new face of God is appearing through cracks in the rigid plaster walls of the institutional church. We are entering a time when the questions being asked by science are almost religious, and religion realizes the answers it give to life's questions have to fit today's culture.

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Willow Creek & Small Group Ministry

A report from the Surrey BC Small Groups Conference by Centre Staff

Surrey BC was the site of a conference on small group ministry organized by the Willow Creek people. The focus was on the importance of small groups as places of belonging, as places where people can experience true community. It is only when you feel you are part of a safe community that people are able to openly explore their faith. You have to belong before you can believe was one of the strong messages of the conference.

Yes, much of the theology was too conservative for us. On the other hand, these are people who have been doing small groups for years and know both the gifts and the challenge of maintaining a viable small group ministry.

Small groups are places where we can share the problems, celebrations, and realities of every day life. We know that loneliness and isolation are a fact of our culture. People are working more from home. Our mobile society means friendships are often left behind as we move to find employment. There is a hunger for relationships.

Bill Donahue, who has written several books on small group ministry, was one of the presenters. He stressed the importance of a small group having a family atmosphere. A family is a place of nurture, relationships, acceptance, and learning. "We have to create an environment that will encourage a family-type relationship."

Dave Treat, in his breakout session, suggested that small group leaders need to be FAT — not overweight, but Faithful, Available, and Teachable. They have to have a faith that shows, and live it. They have to be available to people in the group, really present to their needs and their spiritual journey. And they need to be teachable, which means open to new ideas and model what it means to be a life-long learner.

Sharing Stories

Several speakers stressed the need to make the time and places to share our stories with one another. Hearing someone's story means really getting to know them. The best way to hear someone's story is to ask

questions and take all the time needed to hear what they have to share.

Stories stir up our passion. They motivate and teach and help us become more authentic. When we tell our story, we actually learn it ourselves and become more comfortable with who we are. That sense of our own identity is what makes us authentic.

Creating a Healthy Small Group Ministry

Alan White is a consultant who assists congregations to develop and strengthen their small group ministry. He gave us a quote that underlined the importance of small groups: "You don't have to know everybody, but everybody has to know someone."

People can attend worship at a church for a long time before really getting to know anyone, or be known. A few pleasantries over coffee doesn't do it. It is in the safe environment of a small group that real sharing can take place, and real caring.

He posed the question, "What would your church look like if every person was under the care of a small group?" His answer: it would be growing, it would be energized, it would be doing ministry, and there would be places for new people to truly become part of your community.

One of the practical insights Alan shared is that the average yearly donation on the part of people who are part of a small group is double that of ordinary church members.

What is needed for people to participate in small groups? A simple structure that people can use to flow into small groups is important, as are supportive church staff. The Board and lay leadership need to be on board. There needs to be a good communication system. Above all, attract small group leaders who are passionate about their faith and have a vision of what a relationship with God and modeling one's life on Jesus can do.

We learned a lot at this conference. If you are interested, we will be sharing much of this information at our Athabasca Small Group session next August.

*You don't
have to
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# It's Time to Act

Joyce Madsen

*Joyce's rant!*

I opened the cover of another book last evening — a good one according to my partner. I agree. It is well written and has some insights for church leaders. But I am very frustrated. Why am I finding it difficult to read any more about congregations — why they are in decline, the 7 steps to success, the signposts for effectiveness, and so on and so on?

We, in the mainline church have spent more hours than I can count and more money than I like to imagine analyzing, researching and sharing situations and stories of problems and successes in congregations, mostly in the U.S. **It is time stop researching and start acting!**

There is no easy or perfect solution. We know that. Every congregation has to make the decision to find out what it needs to do to be faithful followers of Jesus in their current community. We know it takes entrepreneurial, risk-taking leadership to find the ways to be a thriving congregation today.

It is helpful to hear the stories of others, and it is interesting to unpack the problems, the demographic shifts, modern vs. post-modern theories, the Christian and post-Christian era, but knowing all of these facts doesn't change anything. **There is no substitute for acting!**

## What We Know

We know:

- ◆ That technology is changing faster than we older people can keep up and that young people are plugged in.
- ◆ That we live in a world filled with visual images and auditory sound bites.
- ◆ That the last four generations have grown up in a world of high quality entertainment.
- ◆ That education levels are increasing.
- ◆ That our world is full of choices for ways to spend our time and money.
- ◆ That we live in a global society.

- ◆ That there are many people who profess a belief in God that have never been inside a church.
- ◆ That there is a need for places of community.
- ◆ That there is a hunger for meaning in our culture.

We can respond to these needs and changes. How?

1. Decide to act and find companions to journey with. Create a circle of people who share a vision and support one another on the journey.

2. Be clear that it is not going to be an easy journey, so commit to hanging in even when the going gets tough.

3. Be clear that there is a difference between identifying those you feel called to serve and those that you would like to serve with you. For example, if you are feeding the homeless you should not expect that they will have a relationship with the congregation. If others are helping you to feed the homeless they may choose to enter into a relationship with the congregation because they feel you are doing something worthwhile.

4. It is important to be clear about why you are entering into this journey — is it to grow your membership or is it to spread the news of God's love? This is why it is so important to be clear about your mission. If others perceive your mission is relevant and authentic, they will find that attractive and want to participate. If you are looking for new members just to help finance your congregation, people will pick up on that and stay away.

5. Find consultants, resources or models to



*There is no substitute for acting!*

guide you through the journey.

At a minimum consider the following actions.

- ◆ Get clear about the congregations identity – gifts, assets, roles, etc. Who has the congregation been in the past? Who is it today?
- ◆ Start to think about mission and vision. Why do you exist? What is God calling you to create in your community? (These are the two questions that will lead to understanding who the congregation needs to be in contact with and how to meet people on their terms.)
- ◆ Identify the group, demographic, cohort, or community that you want to enter into a relationship with. There may be more than one, but begin with one.
- ◆ Meet with people from the target group. Ask them about their needs and what it would take to have them enter into a relationship with the congregation.
- ◆ Identify the resources you require to meet the needs you have identified.
- ◆ Do it!
- ◆ Promote what you are doing using methods that will reach others in the target group.

**Easy?** No. **Simple?** Yes! Set your eyes on the future and don't let anything or anyone stop you from reaching your goal.

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The Congregational Life Centre is a not-for-profit charitable organization dedicated to assisting congregations to be more effective in their ministry.



### Small Group Ministry

Set aside the second week of August for a four-day Small Group Ministry event at the Athabasca Lodge. Experience the support and spiritual renewal that comes from being part of a small group, and explore the theory and dynamics that make small groups such a dynamic means for growth and enrichment in the church today. By the end of the session, each congregational team develops a plan for instituting or strengthening a small group ministry in their setting.

The program starts on Tuesday August 7, 2007 at 10:30 a.m., and concludes Friday Aug. 10 at 2 p.m. Registration is limited so register early. Cost: \$295 per person includes tuition, meals and accommodation.

Call the Centre 780-619-0386 to register. Go to our web site for pictures and comments:

[www.congregationallife.com](http://www.congregationallife.com)



## Athabasca 2007

Some comments from last year's participants:

An exceptional learning environment enabled the exploration of small group ministry.

I appreciated the learning set in nature - a beautiful place to gather.

This is vitally important stuff to be aware of and to become involved in - a simply presented, revolutionary way of being the church.

# Holy Conversations

## Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations

Gil Rendle and Alice Mann have written a book to guide congregations through a planning process. It is different, however, in that it suggests there are multiple ways of planning, not just one. In fact, the two authors are quite definite that they differ as to their favourite process, but are the first to admit it is because they are different people. Since every congregation is different, the same rules apply.

They recognize that “some congregational leaders want to reach out to potential members of the congregation, while others would prefer to direct resources to support current members.” Negotiating all of the preferences and coming up with a plan can be a challenge. It is more of a challenge if the leader assumes there is one single plan.

The task of the leader, say Rendle and Mann, “is to help the people have a purposeful and meaningful conversation about who they are and what they believe is important to do.” Hence the name of the book, *Holy Conversations*. Those conversations may result in a written plan, or they can set the stage for action with a clear purpose. Whatever, there is no perfect plan. The goal is ongoing dialogue.

### The Three Questions

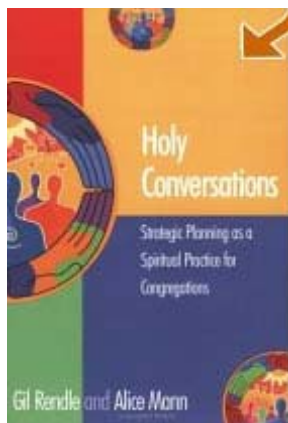
There are only three questions that need to be asked in a planning process:

- ◆ Who are we?
- ◆ What has God called us to do or be?
- ◆ Who is our neighbour?

There are many tools that a leader can use to facilitate the conversations that will answer these questions. There are 80 pages of suggestions labelled A to Y at the back of the book.

Leadership is a dance. “It was Moses who went off alone to encounter God face to face. He would return with new energy, a sense of direction, and a visible radiance from the encounter. Aaron, on the other hand, was the voice of management. He structured the trip from day to day, organizing tasks, assigning responsibilities, and making decisions.” A good planning process has both visionary and management leadership in place, working in cooperation and harmony.

## Book Review



### Vision and Mission

Rendle and Mann have helpful definitions of what they mean by Vision Statement and Mission Statement. “A mission statement is a statement of identity and purpose.” It names who we are and why we exist as an organization. A vision statement, on the other hand, “is a word picture of what our congregation would look like if we were, in fact, able to fulfill our mission statement.”

They make the point that a congregation’s energy and drive come from being clear about their mission.

Part of that clarity comes from what they call “moving to the balcony.” That means being able to step back from day-to-day operations far enough that you can see the larger picture.

Balcony space “is where leaders read books together, where they talk about what they think is happening in their congregation ... where there is room for prayers and discernment for the congregation.” They include a very helpful description of who to invite on the balcony with you, and who not to invite.

When an issue is up for discussion, 2% of the congregation will say no to anything, and 2% have their mind made up. Don’t spend time with them. In the centre of the bell curve are 72% of the congregation who just want to go along and not get too involved. Don’t worry about getting them on the balcony.

Just inside the curve at one end are the 12% who are somewhat negative and at the other end the 12% who are somewhat positive — neither having made up their mind. It is this 24% that you want to take to the balcony with you and work with.

If you want a quick fix, this is not your book. If you want a guide to realistic planning that leads to action, try it.

Gil Rendle and Alice Mann, *Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations*. The Alban Institute, 2003. ISBN 1-56699-286-9. \$32.50 CDN.