

## Congregational Development Workshop

B.H. Carroll Institute

Linda Cannell, November 2015

### Introduction

One of the premises of this workshop is that though we are concerned about organizational health, we are not simply strengthening the institution of the church; we are also working toward the spiritual maturing of the Body of Christ—the whole people of God.

Given that B.H. Carroll Institute's mission is to be “a graduate-level community of faith and learning that equips men and women called to serve Christ in the diverse and global ministries of His church”, that its vision is to “mobilize the priesthood of believers for service in society”, and its partnerships with “teaching churches” is a central strategy, then beginning with reflection on the nature of the church seems appropriate.

### Intentions for This Workshop

Three tasks and several exercises are planned to stimulate reflection on your experience as ministry leaders, and to elicit implications for congregations. We will select from (and/or adapt) the exercises linked to each of the following intentions.

1. ***Reflecting on your experience as you served congregations.*** Describe important insights gained while serving congregations as a ministry leader. What implications are suggested for the church?
2. ***Exploring implications related to the church as an institution and as God's mystery.*** It *seems* easier to manage familiar organizational structures than those mysterious, intangible, spiritual characteristics. What have you learned about how congregations understand and create organizational experiences consistent with the nature of the church both as an institution and as the mystery of God—the Body of Christ? What questions and issues, if any, are suggested for the growth of the church toward maturity?
3. ***Thinking strategically about adapting to change.*** What have you learned about how congregational members evaluate existing organizational practices and create new organizational experiences? The ‘teaching church’ must be a learning congregation. To what extent is it feasible that *congregations* learn; and if it is feasible, why is it important that they *learn*?



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## **Part 1**

### **Reflecting on Your Experience as You Served Congregations**

Describe 2-3 important insights gained while serving congregations. As time permits, you will discuss your insights with colleagues.

#### **EXERCISE: “Dear Diary...”**

On paper, or using your computer, begin a diary entry. Imagine it is the evening of the last Sunday of a month. An experience that day has caused you to reflect on your ministry leadership. Write a diary entry that captures your thoughts and feelings about your work.

(We may invite some to read their entries in order to identify common themes or significant insights.)

#### **EXERCISE: “Significant Events”**

1. Using one index card for each event, write a 1-2 sentence description of 2-3 significant events in your ministry leadership.
2. Form groups of 3-4 people per group. Each group considers the following questions:
  - Why did you judge the events to be significant?
  - In what ways are the events suggestive of future congregational development?
3. Each group shares its most significant insight(s) in large group session.
  - What similarities and differences emerged in the events other groups identified compared with those your group identified?
  - What implications for the church are suggested by these similarities and differences?

## **Part 2**

### **Exploring Implications Related to the Church as an Institution and as God’s Mystery**

In this age we are all conditioned to the visual illusion. What you see is what exists. Remove the visible symbols . . . the cathedrals, the parish church, the bishop in his miter—and the Christian assembly, for many, ceases to exist.

--Morris West. *The Clowns of God*. (New Milford, CT: The Toby Press, 2003), p. 116

Without a clear sense of the church as institution and as God’s mystery, the church becomes simply one more helping agency in society. For many, it *seems* easier to manage familiar organizational structures, than those mysterious, intangible, spiritual characteristics. What have you learned about how congregations create organizational structures and practices consistent with the nature of the church as an institution and as the mystery of God—the Body of Christ?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In the New Testament, Paul writes about the mystery of the Gentiles, a mysterious plan hidden for ages in God. Now “through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (Eph. 3: 5-10). Paul also describes several institutional acts: the need for deacons (Acts 6); policy changes (Acts 15); guidelines for sending out missionaries (Acts 10); criteria for leadership (Titus and Thessalonians); discipline (Corinthians) and so on.

One of the following exercises will be used to elicit insights about this issue:

### EXERCISE: “Imagining 20 Years from Now”

Brown and Isaacs describe an exercise where participants are asked to describe how their children and grandchildren, the next generation, would describe the world 20 years from today.<sup>2</sup> In this exercise the imagining is applied to congregations.

Imagine . . . It is 20 years from today—just one generation from now.

- Imagine you are sitting with your or someone else’s teenage grandchild, talking about what the church has become some 20 years after your active service. She has told you how her young adult parents describe the church today. You tell her about decisions and choices you and others made in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century that paved the way for the church her parents describe.
- God will build the church—but looking back, what particular practices do you feel were significant in shaping the early 21<sup>st</sup> century church—and, by extension, the church the teenager is experiencing some 20 years later? What qualities from the early 21<sup>st</sup> century persist “today”? The teenager asks why those particular qualities persisted—what is your answer?

**In small groups, discuss the implications of your imagining for future congregational development.**

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### Preamble to the next exercise:

Some/many congregational leaders apply management tools, overhaul programs, hire staff, build a new building . . . when seeking to foster congregational vitality. While such responses may have merit at times, without understanding the church as a spiritual entity (as well as an institution), organizational approaches will seldom result in deep and abiding vitality.

### EXERCISE: “Considering Multiple Perspectives as One Whole”

Three perspectives on what characterizes a “healthy” congregation are reflected in three documents that follow the instructions for this exercise:

- 10 Healthy Missional Markers
- Spiritual Outcomes for Congregations from the Epistles
- Twelve Practices for Congregations (Craig Dykstra)

The three documents suggest a broad perspective on the spiritual maturing of congregations; and list behaviors that are grounded in Scripture and in the long history of the Christian church. Problems arise when people use such documents as checklists rather than seek first the life in Christ out of which the behaviors come. In other words, one can perform most of the behaviors without an inner

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<sup>2</sup> Juanita Brown with David Isaacs. *The World Café Shaping our Futures Through Conversations that Matter*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2005: 188-189

life in Christ. Or worse, we can take the lists of behaviors and in effect say to Jesus, “thank you, I can take it from here.”

## Instructions:

**1. Open the envelope given to your group. The envelope contains cut up strips—representing all the behaviors or characteristics from the three documents.**

Assume that **all** the behaviors or indicators of spiritual maturity are biblically and historically grounded; that God mandates **all** the behaviors for *congregations*; that **all** are to be *tangible expressions* of something more profound; and that congregations must pay attention to the ways in which organizational structures and processes help or hinder spiritual maturing.

Each strip is one indicator of a “healthy” congregation. Your first task is to sort the strips into larger categories. Remove duplications—or cluster similar indicators if that aids understanding. As you sort, talk about why it is important to understand the church as an institution and as God’s mystery.

**2. Get the big picture.** One of the more effective tools in education, sports, business, medicine, diplomacy, and so on is *visualization*, or “seeing the big picture”. Visualization may prevent the tendency to lose one’s way in details—details which may or may not be important in the accomplishing of mission.<sup>3</sup> Create a diagram or some way of visualizing the relationship of the categories you developed.

**3. Suggest how spiritual character (the “mystery”) and institutional practices are interconnected.** How do we help congregations become a people who live in Christ (e.g., Eph. 3; Phil. 2; Col. 3; Rom. 6 and 8), and avoid developing and/or maintaining organizational practices and attitudes that hinder God’s mystery?

*“The church doesn’t have a mission, the mission has a church.”*

(Attributed variously to David Bosch, Craig Van Gelder, or Chris Wright)

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<sup>3</sup> For example, many of those who follow Dykstra have isolated one or two practices as the “markers” of maturity. This tendency is not uncommon, but it does limit effectiveness. Could one view the Sermon on the Mount, at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, as a *holistic* “picture” of what constitutes discipleship?

## Document #3: Twelve Practices for congregations



### **Craig Dykstra**

**Research Professor of Practical Theology and Senior Fellow at Leadership Education at Duke Divinity.** Dykstra is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA). Before coming to Duke he was senior vice president for religion at Lilly Endowment, where he had served since 1989. His recent writing focuses on pastoral and ecclesial imagination, as well as Christian practices, as key concepts for thinking about what it means to live the Christian life, to organize the discipline of practical theology, and to re-envision the work of pastoral ministry.

**Drawing on his study of Scripture and the history of the Christian church, Craig Dykstra (1985, 197) proposed twelve practices for congregations.**

### **The Practices**

1. Telling the Christian story to one another.
2. Interpreting together the meaning of that story for our life in the world.
3. Worshiping God together: praising God and giving thanks for God's redemptive work in the world and for our lives together.
4. Praying together.
5. Listening and talking attentively to one another.
6. Confessing to one another, and forgiving and reconciling with one another.
7. Tolerating one another's failures and encouraging one another.
8. Giving one another away, letting go of one another, freeing each other for the work each must do and the life each must live.
9. Performing faithful acts of service and witness.
10. Suffering for and with other people.
11. Providing hospitality and care, not only to one another but also (perhaps especially) to strangers.
12. Criticizing and resisting all those powers and patterns (both within the church and in the world as a whole) which destroy human beings and corrode human community.

### **References**

- Craig Dykstra. No Longer Strangers. *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 6, no.3 (November 1985): 188–200.
- Craig Dykstra. *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices*. Second Edition. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

## **Part 3**

# **Thinking Strategically about Adapting to Change**

“Organizations are like leaky boats. You will spend all your career bailing.”  
-- Ted Ward

Discerning the interactions among spiritual and organizational practices is necessary when selecting processes for planning, decision-making, evaluating, and so on); when examining the nature of our community and its relationships, assumptions about who leads and who gets to make decisions, the way we evaluate progress, and so on.

Dallas Willard famously said, “It’s a decision, not a doctrine!” Organizations are what they are today because of decisions made over the years. But, decisions are not doctrines. They can be examined and changed!

### **Congregational Dynamics**

Figure 1 illustrates three essential processes related to congregational development. The processes indicated on the diagram are as follows. Documents indicated for each process are at the website and represent the many such documents available for these and other processes.

- a) Getting among the people: Interviewing, stimulating reflection, building trust, and nurturing relationship. (See “Get to Know the People of the Church”)
- b) Corporate Affirmations: Key values, commitments and practices. (See “Behaviors Influencing Development”)
- c) Continuous Feedback: Data gathering, *intentional* conversations. (See “Questions for Congregational Development”)

### **What insights are suggested by the following in relation to concrete experiences you might design for individual and congregational learning?**

Marlow<sup>4</sup> describes his vision for the “learning congregation.” He maintains that a learning organization is superbly equipped for two functions: planning and change. The learning church talks through issues, allows diversity of opinion, seeks common ground and shared interests, releases all the gifts of the members. In the learning church there is (1) interdependence, the exercise of spiritual gifts, mutual allegiance and love; (2) shared knowledge of God and the experiential knowledge of a living faith; (3) shared leadership evidenced in the creation of ministry teams, the utilization of spiritual gifts, and in leaders who offer direction, trust, and hope.

Watkins et al.,<sup>5</sup> suggest that the design of a learning organization depends on (1) the creation of continuous learning opportunities (2) encouragement of inquiry and dialogue (3) collaboration and team learning (4) systems that will capture and disseminate learning (5) the empowerment of persons toward a shared vision and (6) the linking of the organization to its environment.

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<sup>4</sup> Joe D. Marlow. Beyond Teaching: The Congregation as a Learning Community *Christian Education Journal*, Volume 16, 1 (Fall 1995): 63-78.

<sup>5</sup> Karen Watkins and Victoria Marsick. 1993. *Sculpting the Learning Organization* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

## Interaction of commitments, organizational structures, and relational processes



Figure 1. Essential Processes for Congregations

There is no shortage of resources you can use to elicit feedback, probe understanding, stimulate creative thinking, engage people in reflection on experience, and so on. “Structured Silence”, “The Appreciate Pause”, and “Looking Differently at Our Problems” are at the website. I have also included there the article “Adaptive Leadership-Cannell (2011)”. Additional reflection exercises are located at the end of that article.<sup>6</sup>

The exercises “Confronting Change” and “Congregational Development Game” follow. The Congregational Development Game is a simulation that we will “play” if time permits.

<sup>6</sup> Resources, beyond those in this document, are at the website: “Trying to Get it Right (2014)” is an attempt to describe in greater detail the interactions among spiritual and organizational practices. Sometime consider the value of merging strategic planning processes common to organizations, with something like the spiritual planning process suggested in “A Planning Process Based on the Spiritual Character of the Congregation”. Many assessment instruments are available. The following are included at the website (also in Word format should you wish to modify language to suit your context): Quinn and Cameron: Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI); Quinn and Cameron: Management Skills Assessment Instrument (MSAI)

**EXERCISE: “Confronting Change”.** Each group will engage questions in one of the following areas:

**Ideas and ways of thinking are challenged constantly in each of our contexts.**

What new directions seem to be emerging among the churches you serve? Given that change is inevitable, what factors could be influencing these directions? What problems and/or opportunities could arise as a result of these new directions?



**Each of us comes from a particular context.**

Describe the ways in which your regional context affects the churches you serve (e.g., socio-economic characteristics, ethnicities, relationships . . .). What strikes you as most significant in relation to your hopes for their future?



**Each church confronts new challenges in each new age.**

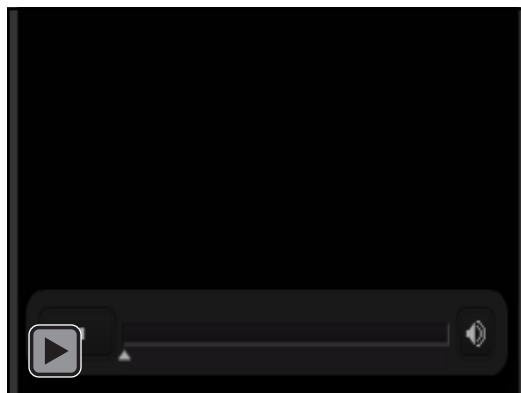
Historical Innovations: John Wesley formed class meetings largely as an alternative family or relational structure. Moses left the book of Deuteronomy as a guide for a new generation about to enter a new land. Joshua led a new nation in understanding what had to be retained and what could be let go as they moved to a new place (Joshua 1-5).

Inherited assumptions about congregational development strategies are challenged in these times. What, for you, are the assumptions that need to be challenged—or that seem ineffective as they influence practice? What religious symbols or commitments offer hope for the churches you serve?

**What themes or ideas emerged in your conversations?**

**Record or draw your ideas using the flip chart paper and markers provided.**

Wondering about the applications of creative and adaptive action? Double click the video below, *Why It's Important to Marry a Good Speller* (right click to select full screen, esc to exit full screen).





# A Congregational Development Game<sup>7</sup>

Organizational culture is made up of the collective attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of members. They are typically resistant to change, partly because the culture was formed at a time of stability in the organization, and change is presumed to be synonymous with instability.

Several have proposed types of organizational culture. Some of these are available at the website. (I have chosen organizational specialists who have a positive reputation but they are by no means alone in describing organizational cultures.) For one part of the game, participants will “play out” behaviors as if they were part of a uniform or monolithic organizational culture. However, in reality, most organizations are comprised of a diverse mix of people who consciously or unconsciously support a variety of organizational types. The task of leadership is to understand and navigate that variety.

For purposes of this game, I have drawn on a description of six cultures common to the academy. It seemed to me that these cultures were adaptable to a congregational environment. Three of the six cultures will be used for the game—those that seem most suited to the church.

## Overview

Congregational health is seen in two areas: (1) Increasing institutional health (transparent communication, trust in decision-making, respect for others’ perspectives, redemptive conflict resolution, dialogue that is more than just talk, leaders who serve, and so on); and (2) Increasing spiritual maturity (corporate worship pleasing *to God*, corporate prayer that is more than just praying through a list, practicing the character that is mandated of the people of God, learning the Word, seeking God’s mind, pursuing justice to the neighbor, and so on).

Growth as an institution and as the people of God—the Body of Christ—does not proceed in the same way in all situations. All organizations, including churches, possess a certain character or “culture”. In the real world, this character is a complex mix of factors—age, gender, attitudes, perceptions, cultural background or ethnicity, prior church experience, location, and so on.

The intent of the congregational development simulation is to experience difference and discern what is required to deal with it. Each group will review the assigned description of their congregation’s character or “culture”. Each group behaves as members of that culture for the duration of the exercise.

## Instructions

*Each group has the same task: Clarify the meaning of congregational health and identify the factors that will best foster it.*

1. Each group learns and visualizes their congregational culture.  
Working in *your* “congregational” group, determine key strategies, decisions, and level of congregational involvement that are required to foster spiritual and organizational development and carry out *your* church’s business and mission. Record and/or visualize your conclusions using the available supplies. You will have 20-30 minutes to complete this phase.
2. Suddenly . . .

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<sup>7</sup> Adapted by Linda Cannell from the simulation *Ecotonos*. See description and purchase information at <http://www.culturaldetective.com/relatedproducts.shtml>

A massive event disrupts society to the extent that churches are now the primary gathering places for people. Several congregations, each formerly of one dominant character or “culture”, have merged. Now, members of these former congregations have to work together as one group. Over the next 20-30 minutes, your task is to determine key strategies, decisions, and level of congregational involvement that are required to foster spiritual and organizational development and carry out the business and mission of this new group. Inevitably, participants will advocate the decisions made in their former church and you will have to find ways to resolve the differences. Record and/or visualize your conclusions using the available supplies.

### 3. Debriefing . . .

Return to your original congregational group and reflect on as many of the following questions as feasible:

- a) What worked in your group? What didn’t?
- b) How did people communicate?
- c) What strategies were used to formulate decisions?
- d) How did the characteristics of your group help or hinder the decision-making process?

Get together in your *merged* group(s) (formed after the crisis event) and reflect on as many of the following questions as feasible:

- a) How did memories and advocacy of the former behaviors affect the process?
- b) Describe the decision-making processes. (Be descriptive rather than evaluative.)
- c) What made utilization of the resources of the entire group possible? Impossible?
- d) What obstacles to multiple group decision-making can you identify?

## Organizational Cultures

Three “cultures” are described below.<sup>8</sup> Each culture has been copied onto a single page and sufficient copies printed for each group member.

### The Managerial Culture

You conceive of your work as “getting the job done.” You believe that the congregation is best sustained through consistent attention to the quality of daily operations. You don’t care as much about the “big picture”. You focus on systems and doing things right. You rely on control and seek to maintain the status quo. You take a short-term perspective in order to get things done. You focus on specified goals and purposes—and judge success as achievement of those goals and purposes. In your mind, managers make an organization work, and they are the leaders.

### The Tangible (or Traditional) Culture

You believe that the traditions of the church must be honored and you support a strong sense of community around those traditions. You value legacy, ritual, and seek to keep the church’s history visible. Change and ambiguity are resisted. You value the predictability of value-based, face-to-face leadership processes. You like to work with people you can see and “touch” and work with in tangible relationships that are long-term and grounded in reality. You support clearly defined roles

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<sup>8</sup> Adapted from Sustainability Through Leadership in the Cultures of Contemporary Collegiate Institutions by William Bergquist and Kenneth Pawlak (see [www.chairacademy.com/conference/2013/\\_papers/Sustaining%20Organizational%20Vitality.pdf](http://www.chairacademy.com/conference/2013/_papers/Sustaining%20Organizational%20Vitality.pdf)); and from Types of Corporate Culture by Linda Ray (see <http://yourbusiness.azcentral.com/types-corporate-culture-9942.html>).

and chain of command. You view the role of leadership as directing people toward a vision or “big picture”.

### The Developmental Culture

You value a social, collaborative culture that is based on team effort and trusting relationships. You are one of the co-creators of programs and activities that further the personal and professional growth of all members of the church. Leadership promotes the competence of others so that they can find meaning in what they are doing and contribute to the health of the church. You value personal openness and service to others, as well as the integration of mind, body, and spirit. The distinction between personal and organizational sustainability is considered artificial. You want members to share life issues and to seek answers to deeper questions. You are an advocate of social justice and want the congregation to take a stand against repressive social attitudes and structures. You value enabling and empowering strategies that bring all stakeholders “to the table.” You want to include members from multiple constituencies with interests that may be in opposition.

“Mission is the meaning of the church. The church can exist only insofar as it is in mission, insofar as it participates in the act of Christ, which is mission. The church becomes the mission, the living outreach of God into the world. The church exists only insofar as it carries Christ to the world. The church is only part of the mission, the mission of God sending his son to the world. Without this mission, there would be no church. The idea of church without mission is an absurdity.”

Vincent Donovan. *Christianity Rediscovered*.