

TWO SIDES OF CHANGE[©]

by
Peter Rudowski
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A case study

The pastor of St. Any Church had reached retirement age. His ecclesiological understanding of the church was "The church is where there is unity in Jesus." As a result he worked tirelessly to break down any barrier that separated any person from the church. Everyone was to be welcome and served by his congregation.

The pastor built a solid ecumenical ministry with other congregations. Partnership and working with others was essential to his beliefs and character. He was recognized by city officials, business leaders, and clergy because of his ecumenical efforts.

The pastor of St. Any Church was a human being and as a result he had a flaw. He was not an administrator. In his words, he was not a "process person." He would have a ministry idea, live that idea for six months, and then move on to the next idea. There was no overall vision or direction for St. Any Church. As a result, St. Any Church was adrift.

Upon the retirement of the pastor, the Church Council defined what they wanted in a new pastor. Top on the list was a good administrator, one who could set a vision and not waver from that vision. Steadfastness, in the new pastor was an essential.

The bishop identified the "perfect" candidate for St. Any Church. His track record was excellent. He knew how to get things done efficiently. He would shore up the administration of St. Any Church and lead it into a new vision.

The pastor identified by the bishop accepted the congregation's call. Upon arrival, he said the congregation was "sick" and that it needed to be changed immediately. Things could not remain the same or members would think nothing different was going to happen. He established a sense of urgency to change St. Any Church. He formed a leadership group of lay leaders. He communicated his vision in sermons, group meetings, in e-mails, and in personal conversations. He guided a reallocation of budget funds to match a new

vision. And, he adjusted paid staff and volunteer responsibilities to match the vision. From all of this effort, the new pastor created a group of very faithful followers.

After four years of ministry, the pastor accepted another call. Over his ministry at St. Any Church, there was a significant exodus of members. Many of those who remained drastically cut their financial support which resulted in a reduction in ministry programs. Constant dissonance lay under the surface of St. Any Church.

The question is, What went wrong? How could a pastor who was considered competent in administration, visioning, and steadfastness leave St. Any Church in decline?

Two sides of change

There are two sides to the change process. First, there is what I call the strategy side of change. The strategy side begins with a discerned vision, God's vision or God's preferred future, for a congregation. Once that vision is defined, church leaders work backwards from the vision to the present. The leaders determine what needs to be done to accomplish the vision.

John Kotter, in his book *Leading Change*, describes change as an eight step process. The process is described below and then compared with the actions of the pastor.

Change strategy begins with a sense of urgency to do something. "Urgency" connotes a crisis which demands immediate action. Change can and does start in response to a crisis. Change can also start when a leader begins to say, "I believe this change is very important to our future success." This statement is not addressing a crisis; rather, it is addressing a need which will affect a congregation's future. The new pastor established a sense of urgency as he proposed his vision.

The second step is to create a coalition. No individual can bring about change alone. Change agents need followers who adopt the change as their own. The new pastor created a group of fol-

lowers.

The third step is for the coalition team to develop a vision and strategy to achieve that vision. The coalition group worked hard to refine the pastor's vision and develop a strategy to bring about change in St. Any Church.

The fourth step is to communicate the vision and the strategy to congregational members. The new pastor did communicate the work of the coalition group. Information was sent to members and congregational meetings were held.

The fifth step is to empower staff and lay leaders. Again, this was done. Staff and lay leaders began to enhance existing ministries and initiate new ministries to accomplish the changes required to achieve the vision.

The sixth step is to have short-term wins. Short-term wins occurred and were communicated through testimonials during worship, articles in the parish newsletter, and in private conversations.

The last two steps, consolidating gains for future changes and anchoring the vision into St. Any Church's culture did not occur because the pastor left St. Any Church.

If one would grade the pastor according to the eight steps in Kotter's change process, the pastor would get an "A." It should be added that many of the changes that the pastor wanted to make are strongly advocated for in 21st century administration literature. There was nothing "crazy" or "off the charts" in the proposed changes.

So again, the question is, What went wrong?

The answer is, the second side of change was ignored. The second side of change is what I call the ministry side of change.

The ministry side of change begins in the present and works towards the future. This is the opposite of the strategy side of change.

All change brings about the end of something be it a relationship, a familiar schedule, or a sense of safety/stability. The ending of something always brings loss. People do not so much fear change as the loss that change brings. Unless loss is acknowledged and addressed in a caring manner, there will be a long-lasting resistance to change that will be hard to overcome.

A key question in identifying those who need pastoral care is, Who will be the "big losers" in this change. In the reallocation of funds and the ending of particular long-tenured ministries, who will feel betrayed? Who will mourn over broken relationships with the recipients of that ministry? For the losers, the loss of a ministry or broken rela-

tionships can be as intense as the loss of a loved one because of death.

The ministry side of change requires personal conversation with those who will experience significant loss because of the change. It also requires that celebrations and/or a good funeral be held for each ministry that is to be eliminated.

Closely related to loss is the anxiety of belonging. Those who are in the change process will consciously or subconsciously ask, Do I still belong? Can I still use my spiritual gifts in this congregation?

In the ministry of change, there needs to be one-on-one assurance that an individual still belongs to the church and will be loved during and after the change has been implemented. In addition, there need to be personal conversations with individuals whose ministry has been diminished or eliminated to determine where and how they might serve in the future.

The ministry of change is time intensive but without intentional effort in this side of change, hurt and anger over the change will continue long into the future. Without the ministry of change, the hurt of loss and the anxiety of not belonging can last for decades.

The ministry side of change did not occur at St. Any Church. The decline in membership and the reduction in financial support can be largely attributed to no planning or implication of a ministry of change.

For a much more detailed discussion about the ministry side of change read William Bridges' book *Managing Transitions*. This book was written for the business community but its insights are easily transferrable to the church.

Summary

If change is to be successfully implemented in a congregation both the strategy and the ministry sides of change must be present. Without both sides, the change process has a high potential of failure and/or creating hurt, anger, and mistrust for a very long time.

Peter Rudowski served as a parish pastor for 33 years. In this capacity, he developed knowledge and skills in parish administration and organizational systems. He now serves as a consultant to pastors and congregations. He is also the author of CONNECTING THE DOTS: Ministering To Your Congregation Through Its Organizational System published by Xlibris - order via the internet at xlibris.

He can be contacted for a consultation at: phone 513-791-8920 or e-mail address: prudowski@fuse.net