

## President's Report

Dear Board Members:

Happy New Year. A new year always comes as a bit of a surprise to me, a time to relearn something as routine as writing the date—which forces me out of the routine and makes me be present to the new day and year. For that reason I've always loved the origin of the name for the month of January—the two-headed Roman god Janus, the god of transitions and beginnings, who can see the past year with one face and the year to come with the other. January is the connection to what we have just experienced and the door opening onto what is coming—which certainly feels right in this church year of goodbyes and hellos.

Last year at this time we were deeply engaged in our Mission Possible work, work that defined last year and informs our strategic planning process this year. We are also in the process of the creating the good goodbye for our beloved Kate Tucker and have just learned that Jen Crow has accepted the position of program minister for next year. Because several board members were unable to meet her when she was here on the 7<sup>th</sup>, the Hiring Assistance Team (HAT) will meet with the board at the beginning of our January meeting to convey their unanimous enthusiasm for Jen and to respond to any questions the board may have. Do review the materials they sent us in preparation for the meeting.

Another important issue on this month's agenda is the size of the board. As you recall we changed the Bylaws last year to create a one-year trial period with a nine-person board with the intent of making a recommendation to the congregation at the end of this church year to continue at this size or to go back to a twelve-member board. We did so as part of our transition to policy governance and at the recommendation of those who write about large church governance (Hotchkiss and Beaumont among others). The Nominating Committee will soon begin thinking about board nominations for next year, and will need to know what size board we will recommend.

Vice President Craig Bierbaum will be chairing this meeting. I use the month of January as a writing retreat—16 writers and artists will join me at our cabin at some point during January for protected work time. Normally I would drive in for the board meeting, but I need to come in so often for the Strategic Planning work sessions this month that Craig has graciously agreed to chair the January 19 board meeting.

I am proud of the work we are doing as a board and so grateful to all of you for your commitment to the church and your generosity with your time and talent.

Blessings in the New Year,

Kathy Coskran

## **Agenda for January 2012 Board Meeting**

Opening Reading and Check in - 15 min

HAT | Program Minister selection – expression of support | q & a | –  
20 min

Sr. Minister Report – 20 min

Visionary Conversation - Hotchkiss reading – 20 min

Board size – 20 min

Strategic Planning Com Report - 5 min

Standing Comm reports:

- Finance – 10 min
- Governance – 5 min

Closing

## **First Universalist Church of Minneapolis Board of Trustees Meeting**

**Thursday, December 15, 2011, 6:30 p.m.**

**Board Members present (absent):** David Bach, Dan Berg, Craig Bierbaum, Craig Bishop, Kathy Coskran, Nancy Gaschott, David Leppik, Paul Robinson, Deborah Talen,

**Clergy present:** Justin Schroeder

**Others present :** Julie Howard

<b><u>Agenda Item</u></b>	<b><u>Presenter</u></b>	<b><u>Discussion</u></b>	<b><u>Action, if any</u></b>
Opening Words/ Meeting Preparation	Paul Robinson	The meeting was called to order at 6:33 p.m. Paul opened with some historical perspective and words from Rev. James Tuttle. Kathy invited a seasonal check-in. Deborah Talen announced her resignation from the board for personal reasons.	
Consent agenda	Kathy Coskran	Approve October and November minutes. Approve new members.  <b>Action: Motion to approve Consent Agenda.</b>	Passed
Senior Minister Report	Justin Schroeder	Justin elaborated on his printed report in the <a href="#">December Board Packet</a> : Described evolution of small group programming. Application deadline is Jan 30 for Director of Religious Education, but search will be extended to summer if we don't find the right candidate. Progress in program minister search--might have candidate selected before March--start date still August 1. Justin reported that the two Faith in Action "umbrella" meetings went well last week; well attended and valuable discussion. The church auction income was about \$25,000, which was under budget. He reported progress toward the short term goal of \$200,000 in gifts and pledges to the Cummins Ministerial Internship Fund. B.J. Van Glabbeek will be leaving the administrative staff with the birth of her second child. Justin asked that the Board anticipate his proposal for a cost of living increase for staff in next year's budget. He also commented on the tremendous attendance at last Sunday's service, estimated at over 1,000. All agreed that the choir and orchestra sounded terrific. There were a number of questions that Justin addressed, including budget implications of new positions and new salaries, and staff workload this year and whether Justin might still consider temporary additional staff. Deborah Talen asked that special consideration be given to volunteer management in hiring of any new personnel. There was a request for clarification about the selection of nonprofit beneficiaries of Sunday offerings. Justin explained that the First Universalist Foundation will be recommending a process for these decisions in the next few months. Paul Robinson commented that the auction was a wonderful and successful event in spite of falling short of our overly optimistic budget goal.	
Finance Committee Report	Nancy Gaschott	Nancy reported that the Finance Committee received a financial report from Susan at last night's meeting. It included an overview from Susan showing that, so far, budget shortfalls are offset by savings. There is still staff concern about additional event fundraising goals this year. Staff suggests that the Committee reconsider the timing of an audit, perhaps postponing for a year, so that our conversion to QuickBooks can be fully and effectively implemented before the audit takes place. Nancy presented a financial limitations monitoring schedule that was reviewed by the committee and recommended to the Board for inclusion in the Governing Policies Handbook. The board reviewed the recommended calendar ( <a href="#">Attachment A</a> ).	

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		<b>Action: Motion to approve addition of financial monitoring schedule to Governing Policies Handbook.</b>	Passed
Visionary Conversation	Justin Schroeder	Justin invited each board member to share a couple minutes of reflection on the reading materials in the <a href="#">Board Packet</a> . Various comments and questions: Interest in the various ratios between budget, staff size and membership presented in the readings; these are descriptive but also tempting to view as prescriptive. Comments reflected on changing roles of ministerial leadership as congregation grows. There was a broader discussion about the dynamics of growth. Regarding staff/volunteer ratios—the challenge is finding correct balance. Rather than view the averages presented in the reading materials as prescriptive, we should be willing to take a step back and think outside the box. Are we using staff appropriately? Can we have an outside assessment? There needs to be more emphasis on volunteer coordination. Justin observed that the visionary goals are the real work of the church, and we need to staff appropriately to meet those goals. Numbers in themselves are not the goal. There was some discussion about how or if we need to educate the congregation about these changes as we grow. Craig Bishop asked for and Justin provided some historical perspective on the ambitions and growth of First Universalist over the last twenty years. Deborah and Kathy added their observations. Justin explained how the staff is trying to build the model to achieve the visionary goals as we deal with the day to day demands of operating the church effectively and efficiently.	
Governance Committee Update	Craig Bierbaum	Craig reported on the two recent meetings of the Governance Committee (notes included in <a href="#">Board Packet</a> ). These have been focused on the visionary goals survey that is planned for this spring. Paul Riedesel attended these meetings and has offered his expertise as the committee plans its survey. The committee is trying to match the survey to visionary goals—a challenge of interpretation and testing. Question formulation, survey design, formatting and testing may cause a delay in the intended February survey launch.	
Strategic Plan Update	David Bach	David reported that the Strategic Planning Committee has met frequently. There was an article in the December <i>Liberal</i> and there will be another in January. In preparation for the congregational meetings in January, the committee is deliberately inviting members to specific meetings so that a range of perspectives will be represented. Kathy Coskran passed out a schedule asking each trustee to attend one or two (or more) of the scheduled meetings. Staff is also working on a capacity evaluation document that will be folded into the process following the focus groups. The committee has high expectations for inspiring conversation with the congregation. Kathy also commented that both the Strategic Planning and Governance Committees are outstanding and that the Board is very grateful for their efforts.	
Good Goodbye Committee	Dan Berg	Dan reported on the progress of the Good Goodbye Committee in planning events around the final months of Kate Tucker's service. There was also discussion of the honors being proposed by the Committee in recognition of Kate's extraordinary service to the First Universalist community.	
Proposed sponsorship of Jim Foti	Kathy Coskran	Kathy referred to the materials in the <a href="#">Board Packet</a> describing the process and expectations of the congregation in agreeing to sponsor a ministerial candidate. There was enthusiastic support for	

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		sponsorship of Jim Foti in his pursuit of Unitarian Universalist ministry.  <b>Action: Motion to approve First Universalist Church sponsorship of Jim Foti as a Candidate for fellowship in the Unitarian Universalist Ministry.</b>	Passed
Meeting Summary		Justin invited the board to reflect on our anthem, <i>Spirit of Life</i> , and how our time together has embodied these themes.	
Adjourn		The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 p.m.	

### Important Dates:

Next meeting: January 19, 2012

Treats for next meeting: Nancy Gaschott

Opening words for next meeting: Nancy Gaschott

# **First Universalist Church of Minneapolis Board of Trustees Meeting**

## **Attachment A**

*The board delegates to the Finance Committee responsibility for monitoring compliance with the board approved policies in the areas of annual budgeting and long-term financial planning, financial condition and activities, and asset protection.<sup>1</sup>*

*The standard of evaluation shall be whether the Senior Minister has made reasonable progress toward achieving the visionary goals, while remaining within the boundaries of the established board policies.<sup>2</sup>*

### **FINANCE COMMITTEE MONITORING SCHEDULE AND METHODS**

This document is intended as a summary interpretation of those sections of the Governing Policies Handbook (GPH) that describe the Finance Committee's monitoring responsibilities. Not a stand-alone document, it must be used along with the GPH.

#### **1. Annual Budgeting**

The budget calendar and process (careful and transparent) is defined thoroughly in the GPH. In a typical year when the Annual Meeting of the congregation is held on the first Sunday in June, the senior minister begins the process by not failing to "present the draft annual operating budget and capital expenditure budget to the finance committee for review and comment" at its meeting in early to mid-March.

The monitoring duties of the committee as proscribed in the GPH, then, are to provide that review and comment, and to ensure that the senior minister does not fail to follow the schedule.

#### **2. Long Term Financial Planning**

The GPH says that the senior minister "shall not fail to engage in strategic planning" regularly, including financial planning. The committee's role, then, is to remind the senior minister of this responsibility.

#### **3. Financial Condition**

The GPH's general limits on the senior minister in this area are twofold: do no harm to the church's financial health, and don't fail to honor donor restrictions and church priorities when making financial decisions. The committee performs these responsibilities by its careful review of the regular ("at least quarterly") financial reports it receives from the senior minister, referring in each review to the bullet points included in this section of the GPH. This document provides a schedule for review of quarterly reports that provides extra time for year-end close and the production of the first quarter report. Note: There is no prohibition on the committee's ability to request more frequent reports if necessary in any given year.

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<sup>1</sup> Governing Policies Handbook, 11/11/11, p. 17: Standing Committee Charges,

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 12: Monitoring Senior Minister Performance

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### 4. Asset Protection

The GPH lists 10 distinct items related to asset protection. On at least an annual basis each of these should be considered by the committee. This document builds these into the schedule; individual members or teams may be assigned to conduct some of the required monitoring.

<b>MONTH</b>	<b>METHOD</b>	<b>If assigned, to whom?</b>
January	(1) Review 2 <sup>nd</sup> quarter financial report, attending to each Financial Condition item in the GPH. (2) Consider physical plant and equipment; if needed, make recommendations to senior minister that may be included in next year's budget. (3) Ensure RFP for auditors is issued if an audit is to be conducted.	
February	Meet as necessary if earlier tasks not completed. If a year for which an audit is to be conducted, choose and/or contract with auditor.	
March	Review and comment on draft budget as presented by senior minister: is it thorough, and guided by established priorities? Refer to details in GPH.	
April	(1) Monitor budget schedule. (2) Review 3 <sup>rd</sup> quarter financial report, attending to each Financial Condition item in the GPH. (3) Consider whether the church's intellectual property, information, and files are sufficiently protected. (4) Is the church's non-profit status adequately protected? (5) Bring to the attention of the senior minister any issues related to the church's reputation in the community.	
May	(1) Monitor budget schedule. (2) Ensure sufficient property and liability insurance plans are in place for upcoming FY.	
June	Attend Annual Meeting. Committee meet as necessary if earlier tasks not completed.	
July and/or August	New committee members named, welcomed, provided with copy of the GPH, and oriented. Work plan for year presented. Consider: should the senior minister be reminded that strategic and financial planning are needed?	
September	Review prior year-end financial statements. If an audit has been conducted, review the audit report and senior minister's plan to attend to	

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	any audit recommendations.	
October	(1) Review current investment policies for all church investments; meet with investment manager; amend policies and/or agreements if needed. Ensure investments are made according to current policy. (2) Review staffing structure: do only bonded personnel have access to material amounts of funds? Are proper controls in place? (3) Review policies and practices regarding donor restrictions on all funds for compliance.	
November	(1) Review 1 <sup>st</sup> quarter financial report, attending to each Financial Condition item in the GPH. (2) Are the statements presented using Generally Accepted Accounting principles? (3) Do staff solicit two bids for purchases > \$10,000?	
December	Meet as necessary if earlier tasks not completed.	

**First Universalist Church  
Statistical Report  
January 19, 2012**

**MEMORIAL SERVICES: 1**

Theresa Schroer, December 17, 2011 – Rev. Kate Tucker

Tom Plotkins, nephew of Jim Mickman and Serai Brenner, Nov. 26, 2011 – Rev. Kate Tucker

**MARRIAGES/SERVICES OF COMMITMENT: 0**

**MEMBERS FOR APPROVAL: 0**

**MEMBERS REINSTATED: 2**

Tim Grafe

Karen Seal Grafe

**MEMBERS FOR REMOVAL: 4**

Theresa Schroer, deceased

Nancy Erickson, spending more time in western suburbs

Phillip Otterness, moved to Montana

Deborah Morse-Kahn, moved to Silver Bay, MN

**CHILDREN DEDICATED: 1**

Lydia Lucille Darsow, daughter of Blake and Molly Darsow

	To Date	End of Year Totals			
	2011-2012	2010-11	2009-10	2008-09	2007-08
MEMBERS (Fiscal Year)	37	98	75	72	41
<b>TOTAL MEMBERS:</b>	<b>904</b>	<b>927</b>	<b>849</b>	<b>840</b>	<b>824</b>

**TOTAL MEMBERS AS OF THE LAST MEETING: 906**

**To be added: 2**

**To be removed: 4**

**TOTAL MEMBERS: 904**

## Notes from First Universalist Church Finance Committee Meeting

DATE: 14 December 2011

PRESENT: Dan Berg, Craig Bishop, Susan Claeys, Bill Elwood, Nancy Gaschott, Shawn Hartfeldt, Riley Owens.

1. **Financial Statements.** Susan distributed 11/30/11 financial statements, including:

- Summary of Financial Results, reporting variances from budget: Revenue shortfall from pledges and auction is offset by decreased expense from not hiring a Director of Religious Education on schedule.
- Statement of Activities from the church accounting system
- Statement of Financial Position from the church accounting system
- Excel Susan-created Statement of Activities

The committee agreed that we'd like to see these documents regularly, and in addition Susan's Excel-created Statement of Financial Position.

2. **Cummins fund** – Susan asks whether she should establish a separate account for the Cummins Fund; Committee said yes.

3. **Unity Leadership** issues: UL has not yet applied for its 501(c)(3) status.

Discussion:

Susan has met with MAP to see about getting their help with this issue. MAP has been very helpful already with advice. There's a fiscal sponsorship template on MNCN website.

Unity Leadership needs to be separated on the books, and a way found to represent the different fiscal years

The committee wonders whether a retired attorney from the congregation could take this challenging project over from Susan. Karen Wille?

There needs to be some sort of an Affiliate Agreement detailing the operating agreement between the church and UL.

4. On the issue of interpreting donor intent and defining **church obligation related to old gifts and bequests**: the committee wondered whether MAP could also help with this issue.

On this issue also: Dan reported on Stephenson and Boutell funds, held at the Minneapolis Foundation, and will write something up. These should be restricted to social justice work. Susan will research to see to which account these distributions have been deposited.

5. An **independent audit** of the 2011/12 church year? The committee has been recommending that the church have an independent financial audit, and the Governing Policies require one at least every 3 years.

As a practical matter, Susan shared her misgivings about scheduling an audit for the church year 11/12 because she and her staff will be engaged in the conversion of the accounting software from the Church System to Quickbooks at the same time as the audit preparation work would need to be happening.

The committee had an initial discussion about this topic, but ran out of time before concluding it. The discussion boiled down to:

A. From someone who has managed 2 dozen audits and knows how much work goes into the preparation of them (Nancy): it's regrettable, but the conversion is the priority, and it's hard to imagine how both could happen at the same time, so it makes sense to put off the audit for another year.

B. From others, speaking from the Governing Policies, which puts the responsibility for scheduling the audit on the Finance Committee: Let's either hold off on the conversion or figure out a way to do both – the audit has been put off for too long.

(And note: the conversion will require not only new software but probably new hardware as well.)

6. Another topic the church needs to address is the **church mortgage**: the balloon payment of over \$600K, due January 1, 2014

Adjourned at 6:00

(NOTES: Nancy Gaschott)

Senior Minister Report to the Board of Trustees, January 2012

**Mission:** In the Universal Spirit of love and hope, we give, receive, and grow.

**Visionary Goals:**

**1) The people of First Universalist Church grow in their UU faith: we are equipped to live out our values and experience worship, spiritual practices, and rituals that challenge, comfort, celebrate, and heal**

We're launching 10 new small groups in January, including groups for newcomers, new parents, and more. In addition, I've been blogging for the month of January about spiritual practices and disciplines (from a UU perspective). Many people are reading the blog, and engaging in the online conversation – it's a digital way to introduce practices and rituals to our faith community (and beyond). Mikki Morrisette and members of the church put together a wonderful video explaining Small Groups: <http://firstuniv.org/smallgroups>.

Our "Living Resolutions" sermon series is being well received. In general, the congregation has responded well to our various sermon series. In February, we'll launch "Church: Risky Business," and then in March and April, offer "Living in Holy Tension," and "The Good News" (focusing on the good theological news of Unitarian Universalism.)

The "Open Minds" group (formerly the Secular Bible Study Group), the Buddhist Meditation group, and many other groups continue to meet, and help people develop practices and meaningful rituals in their lives (as well as feed people's intellectual search for deeper meaning, as it relates to V.G. #2).

Ruth MacKenzie is leading a three week series of lectio divina (holy reading/meditation.) I recently blogged out this: <http://wellswedidnotdig.blogspot.com/2012/01/day-5-of-spiritual-practices-engaging.html>)

**At First Universalist Church, people of all ages find opportunities to engage in an intellectual and spiritual search for deeper meaning and understanding both as individuals and in community**

We've had a number of applicants for the position for the Director of Religious Education. We'll begin initial interviews in February. (You can find the position description here: <http://firstuniv.org/DREjob>.)

The new DRE will help create "opportunities to engage in an intellectual and spiritual search for deeper meaning and understanding" for families and children. We believe that the right Director of Religious Education can help us begin to

reshape and re-imagine how our religious education/faith formation program can best serve the needs of our families and children.

Our Christmas service project was well attended, as families and people of all ages, prepared snack and laundry packages for food shelves around the state (we partnered with United Way on this project.)

Finally, as a staff, we are beginning to weave spiritual reflection into every meeting we have. We are also doing this all of the groups, teams, and committees we work with, beginning to move in a direction, so that no matter where you are in the organization, you can engage in this practice.

**First Universalist Church is an intergenerational community of mutual caring and support. We build this community by actively welcoming all and encouraging each other to discover, develop and share their gifts**

The choir continues to grow and be an place where new members are actively welcomed and encouraged to develop their gifts.

This summer (2012), we are planning to update our membership data base. This will be a first step in the process of helping us better track and understand the gifts and talents of our members.

A youth video team, with staff and adult support, create a dynamic Day of Service video: <http://firstuniv.org/2012dayofservice>.

**The people of First Universalist Church work to build a just, loving and sustainable world. We are a visible, influential voice, and we act to shape the larger community into a more just and equitable society.**

We continue to grow into a faith community that lives at the intersection of social justice and spiritual development. We are intentionally

Our partnership with Habitat for Humanity is strong and vibrant, and our monthly building projects continue to attract newcomers and long time members. Another church has joined us in our Habitat Project.

Plans are underway for another Day of Service on Feb 4, 2012. We are trying to have many of the service projects that day fall under one of the major "Umbrellas" (social justice focus areas), so that there is some focus to the day. (NOTE TO BOARD: If there is an organization you love, and you are willing to serve as a leader for a project on the day of service, please contact Debra at [debra@firstuniv.org](mailto:debra@firstuniv.org).)

## **Updates:**

**Cummins Fund:** We have met our initial goal of \$200,000 raised (actual gifts and pledges) for the Cummins Fund. We'll continue to build this Fund over the coming years, designating a monthly offering for the Fund, and coordinating efforts with the Planned Giving Team as well.

**Interfaith Clergy Group:** At a recent gathering, we talked about the "Occupy" movement, and ways that the Downtown Clergy Group could learn, and perhaps be involved. I am taking the lead on engaging with some of the people involved in Occupy Minnesota and we are planning to have some sort of meal or gathering with them to learn more.

**Intern in 2012-2013:** Previously, I had informed the Board that we would not have an intern next year. However, circumstances have changed, and a unique opportunity has emerged. We're still figuring out all the details, but it looks like we will have an intern next year. I will keep the Board informed as this process unfolds.

**Staff Updates:** BJ Van Glabbeek left our staff team on January 13, 2012. She has been an outstanding member of the Administrative Team. We wish her and her family the best, as they prepare to welcome their second child, Miles. We have a full time person from Accountemps who is working during the interim time until we find a replacement for BJ.

**Sunday Attendance and Space Issues:** Worship attendance continues to be between 550 and 650 people per Sunday, reaching as high as 700-900. Youth and Religious Education attendance remains around 300 per Sunday. Space, particular for the Religious Education classes, is an ongoing challenging. We are at capacity in many of our Religious Education classes.

## Notes from First Universalist Church Finance Committee Meeting

DATE:

PRESENT: ~~Dan Berg, Craig Bishop~~, Susan Claeys, Bill Elwood, Nancy Gaschott, Shawn Hartfeldt, Riley Owens.

1. We briefly discussed the memo that Nancy had offered dividing our tasks between GPH/monitoring tasks and advice. Bill asked where we would include the development of the budget that will accompany the current strategic planning process. Susan responded that staff would be working on this, and that our committee would review. An example would be a major capital project.

### 2. Unity Leadership

Facts: In late 2009 or early 2010 the board of trustees had accepted and approved the 12/9/09 recommendation of the Ad Hoc committee on the future structure of Unity Leadership Program (ULP), to spin off ULP.

Bill and Shawn have agreed to help Susan by serving on a working group.

Susan outlined these facts: ULP has not yet filed its application for nonprofit status with the IRS. A draft operating agreement has been worked on but is not final. A draft fiscal sponsorship agreement has also been created. Deb works 30 hours for ULP and 20 hours for the church. She has many questions, including who should be the employer of the interns on the ULP staff, how will they be covered by insurance, etc. The interns work in the field; 2 part time staff work on site.

The First Universalist Foundation supports the work of ULP with its only, or nearly only, grant.

Shawn's concern that ULP is very small to be a stand alone nonprofit. Should it become part of another group?

Mission of our ULP working group: To help staff identify, document, and represent the church's interests related to the spin off of ULP: What support can/should the church continue to

provide to ULP during the transition to full spin off? What legal and operational relationship does the church want to have with ULP now and in the future? What timeline should govern the spin off? Considerations should include the financial viability of a spun-off ULP, and the opportunity and other costs to the church of its continued support of ULP.

We suggest that ULP's nonprofit application should be completed and submitted no later than 3/1/12. And that the committee's work be completed in this church year, and that it be coordinated with the strategic plan a possible. We also note that several pertinent questions must be answered prior to the finalization of the budget.

3. The committee reviewed the budget calendar as defined by the Governing Policies Handbook.

4. The committee discussed the fact that the budget will need to include a set aside to cover the expense of sabbatical leaves for the senior and probably program minister.

Susan's opinion is that the set aside would not need to be reflected as an expense until the year it's paid, as it's not paid out if the ministers leave.

5. Audit and conversion.

What timing for the conversion? Susan is not sure that she'd have time to do it this year. Consultants might be needed. The committee agrees (with Susan) that ideally it would be completed by June 30.

The committee wants to support Susan to get the conversion done, and acknowledge that a computer network will be required as well as consultant time. Perhaps the two together would cost around \$20,000. This might require more draw down of the reserves than the budget required. But the expenses would probably be capitalized.

We agree that the audit should not be of this church year, due to the workload issue and the practical need for an apples to apples audit comparison.

The audit will be of the church year 2012/13, and will need to be budgeted in the 2013/14 year.

Adjourned at 6:00

(NOTES: Nancy Gaschott)

**Background article for conversation about Board Size (you've seen this one before, but it's worth re-reading):**

## Determining Ideal Board Size

by Susan Beaumont

I've always heard that the governing board of a congregation should grow smaller as the church becomes larger. But is that always true? And is there such thing as an ideal size?

Effective boards in every size congregation must tend to three types of work: *fiduciary* (tending to the stewardship of tangible assets), *strategic* (working to set the congregation's priorities and seeing that resources are being deployed in accordance with those priorities) and *generative* (problem framing and sense making about the shifting environment of the congregation).

In the large congregation, many of the fiduciary responsibilities of the board are better delegated to others. The board can never abdicate its responsibility for fiduciary oversight, but it can rely on board committees and the staff team to do much of the fiduciary work on its behalf. As congregations grow larger, governing boards must increasingly focus their time on the strategic and generative work of the congregation if the congregation is going to thrive. This type of work is best accomplished by smaller decision making bodies, with specific skill sets in strategic leadership.

The board of the multi-celled congregation (200–400 in weekend worship attendance) is often consumed by fiduciary work. The staff team is not yet large enough to assume the full managerial responsibilities of the church, and lay leadership is still actively involved in the management of ministry. Governing bodies in this size congregation are often representational in nature, consisting of the people who are doers and managers of the ministry alongside the staff team. Much of the monthly board meeting is wrapped up in planning for and reporting on ministry management. This board often needs to make special provisions for strategic planning work, outside of the context of their monthly meetings.

The governing board in the professional-sized congregation (400–800 in weekend worship attendance) is intuitively drawn toward a more balanced focus between fiduciary and strategic work. The largest struggle of the board is figuring out how to be more strategic and generative on a regular basis. The staff team is becoming highly specialized and is better able than the board to tend to operational management. The board must avoid micro-managing the staff. Congregations in this size category feel the need to reduce the size of the board in order to move away from reporting out/operational management and into more strategic and generative work.

Healthy congregations in the strategic-sized category (800–1,200 in weekend worship attendance) have generally learned some things about delegating the fiduciary work of the board, in service to more time spent on strategic and generative work. The governing body in this congregation has typically been downsized to create a more nimble decision making body. The voice of the staff team is represented by the senior clergy leader and the executive pastor. Other professional staff members attend board meetings only when invited, to evaluate or reflect upon a particular aspect of ministry that rests within the staff member's sphere of influence.

What size is the right size? A group trying to engage in effective strategic decision making faces two key challenges. The first is the management of communication. The second is decision making accuracy. Generally having more people in a group will increase the likelihood that someone will have the information needed to make the decision and someone will propose a correct choice or solution. However, more people produce more opinions that have to be communicated and discussed. This makes the management of communication process more difficult, which ultimately ends up reducing decision making effectiveness.

The difficulty of managing communication within a small group is roughly proportional to the number of possible social interactions within the group. With two people there is only one possible social interaction. With three people there are three possible two-person interactions and one three way interaction for a total of four possible interactions. The number of possible social interactions begins to explode in groups with more than five people.

Most of us cannot imagine reducing our governing bodies down to 5 individuals, but the closer we can get to that number, the more effective our problem solving will be. Larger groups require skillful leadership and formal structures in order to function effectively. Formal structures, such as parliamentary procedures, work by deliberately stifling many of the possible social interactions. Unfortunately, this can also stifle creativity which is critical for strategic and generative work, and it also insures that most decision making will be dominated by the most politically influential individuals in the room, whether or not they have the best ideas.

## CHAPTER 7

# Acculturation and Engagement of the Laity

ANNA AND CURTIS HAVE BEEN AFFILIATED WITH UNITY CHURCH FOR NINE years. They are passionate about the congregation's ministry to the homeless and working poor. Over the years they have taken turns serving on the social justice ministry team and they have actively invested themselves in managing Recycled Treasures, a ministry aimed at distributing gently used clothing, toys, and household items to the economically disadvantaged.

During the course of Anna and Curtis's history with Unity Church, its weekend worshipping community has grown from 350 to 1,100. The congregation's ministry to the working poor has grown accordingly. The church has experienced many organizational growing pains over the years, but Anna and Curtis have been unfazed by this as they have happily and effectively led the ministry. They have made most of the decisions pertaining to the administration of Recycled Treasures over the years and have had the support of the staff team as needed. That is, until recently.

Sarah is the clergy leader who oversees the social justice ministry of the congregation. Recently, she has been evaluating how the congregation's various ministries to the economically disadvantaged in the community are working together. One point of tension has become increasingly obvious to her. Recycled Treasures traditionally engages in a large-scale donation of used clothing and toys during the month of December in an attempt to support the working poor during the holiday season. The congregation also

has a practice of providing Christmas gift baskets to community families in need. The baskets incorporate food, new clothing, and toys purchased with the specific needs of chosen families in mind. Both ministries require a significant investment of staff time in the month of December, and both require dedicated use of the same space in the church building. The two ministries tend to serve the same population.

Last month, Sarah made the decision to reschedule the Recycled Treasures distribution of clothing and toys from December to April, believing that both of the ministries as well as the client base that both ministries serve would be better served by the rescheduling. She appropriately worked the change in scheduling through the staff team and through the ministry team that supports social justice ministries. Both teams supported the schedule change, and Sarah informed Anna and Curtis about the change well in advance of their traditional gearing-up process for the December Recycled Treasures drive.

One week after Sarah informed Anna and Curtis about the scheduling change, the couple requested a meeting with the senior pastor of Unity. Walking into his office, Anna and Curtis submitted their resignations from Recycled Treasures and asked that their names be removed from the congregation's membership book. They expressed outrage that this ministry that had always been theirs to administer had suddenly been co-opted by a member of the staff team. In fact, Anna and Curtis thought that the leadership of the congregation had generally gotten very much off track. They observed that this used to be a congregation where the staff team served the volunteer leaders of the church as they engaged their ministry. The staff team would shape their time and attention in response to the leadership initiatives of the laity. Now it seemed that the efforts of the laity were being managed and directed by the staff team, and things were feeling very backwards and misguided. The pastor's efforts to explain how things needed to work in the size congregation that Unity had become were wasted on Anna and Curtis. They left his office and Unity Church on that day and never returned.

## WHOSE CHURCH IS IT?

The disorientation that laity experience as a congregation moves out of the multi-celled size category and into the professional and strategic zones is palpable. Astute lay leaders will ask, "If the staff team is going to run the place, then what work is ours to do?" When faced with the transition from being a congregation that is managed by the laity to being one that is managed by the staff team, a variety of missteps can take place. Some congregations move into a mode of operation that treats the staff team like hired help, employed to do the ministry of the church on the congregation's behalf. This mindset results in a disengaged laity who see their role as executive directors and financiers of the work. Other congregations set up a dichotomy in which the members become watchdogs over the staff team, making certain that the staff team does not misuse its authority or the assets of the church. This approach also results in a laity that is disengaged from the active ministry of the congregation.

Healthy large congregations realize that the ministry of the church still belongs to the members, who must actively participate in the ministry. The staff team manages ministry efforts but does not do ministry on behalf of the laity. The members in the large congregation are active leaders, discerners, governors and ministry participants. Their involvement in decision making works differently in the large church than it does in the small to mid-size congregation. This can cause those who come out of smaller church environments to feel less involved.

In the small and mid-size congregation, laity and clergy often sit in the room together to negotiate the management and leadership needs of the congregation. Board meetings and committee meetings are grounded in the managerial decisions that form the ministry. In fact, one of the critiques of church life in the mid-sized congregation is the amount of time that members spend on administration. One often hears laity express a longing to spend less time in the administration of ministry and more time in the actual doing of ministry.

Toward the upper end of the professional size category and moving into the strategic size category, the healthy congregation begins to experience a phenomenon that feels like the staff team is seizing control of the congregation. Decisions that used to be made by members are suddenly made by members of the staff team. Lay leaders often experience a sense of betrayal by their clergy leaders. Initially members may feel that the clergy leadership of the church is on some kind of power trip, trying to wrest control away from lay leadership. In fact, the clergy leaders are intuitively responding to the organizational needs of the church, a need for a different kind of decision making.

So, what is the role of laity in the large congregation? How do laypersons effectively engage in the decision making of the church? How does staff ensure that lay leaders continue to own the ministries of the church? I'll examine these questions and more in this chapter as we explore the involvement of the laity and the way in which acculturation works in the large congregation.

## THE CENTRALITY OF LAY LEADERSHIP

Within the Christian tradition we often lift up 1 Corinthians 12 as a call to the ministry of the laity.

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines. (1 Cor. 12:1–11 NIV)

When leaders grow confused about the role of the laity in the large congregation, arguments will be made that the church has lost its way and forgotten about the giftedness of the laity. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. I believe that the giftedness of the laity is more acutely emphasized and valued in the large congregation, not less.

In the smaller congregation the strategic leadership, the strategic management, and the operational management of the church tend to happen interchangeably in a variety of meeting venues. Board meetings, committee meetings and staff meetings all incorporate dialogue in all three arenas, sometimes within a single meeting. The blending of all forms of leadership and management, with lay leaders in the room and involved in the debate, means that laity is fully integrated into the decision-making life of the congregation. The downside of this type of integrated decision making is that people often feel that their personal giftedness is not being used to its fullest. Some long to be released from the administration of the ministry, so they can engage in more hands on ministry. "I just want to sing, or teach the kids, or serve the homeless. I don't want to attend all of these meetings."

As a church grows larger, the complexity of the congregation grows. There is an increasing need for professionalism in the ministry and for coordination across areas of ministry. Strategic leadership, strategic management, and operational management can no longer happen in the same place. Decision-making authority starts getting parceled out to the governing board, staff team, and committees of the congregation. The governing board becomes more strategic in its focus, delegating the operational management of the church to the staff team. (See chapter 6, "Governance and Board Structure," for a more complete description of which leadership bodies need to adopt which type of work.)

The result of these shifts in organization, and the resulting changes in the distribution of authority, means that lay leaders are often no longer in the room when key operational decisions are being made. So those who don't want to attend so many meetings are happy, but others may feel left out. For some, this change creates the feeling that the church is being hijacked by the staff team and that the role of laity has been diminished. In fact, the redistribu-

giftedness of the laity more fully than the system in which everyone makes all the decisions together. When lay leaders are freed from the operational decision making that is taken over by the staff team, they are also freed to more fully engage the ministerial areas in which they are gifted. Those who are good at the tasks of governance serve as board leaders. Those with passionate and creative ideas about the various ministries of the church serve on ministry teams and work alongside staff leaders to shape those ministries. Those with particular gifts for teaching invest themselves more fully in the tasks of teaching . . . and so on. As the staff team becomes more professionalized and specialized, the work of the laity also becomes more specialized, with each person working more exclusively in his or her own area of giftedness.

Some of the changes associated with these shifts will register as losses to leaders who've been intimately engaged in the life of the congregation, people like Anna and Curtis in the story that opened this chapter. When a congregation goes through this kind of transition, intentional work must be done with lay leaders to help them understand how their voices can be used to influence decision making, if they so desire.

In the large congregation, proportionately fewer people make decisions than in the small congregation. The staff team is larger, the board is smaller, and a relatively small group of lay leaders are actually making decisions on behalf of the congregation. In the large church, those lay leaders who make decisions in particular areas of ministry are rarely aware of decision making in other areas of ministry. Even board leaders (if they are focusing on the strategic leadership of the congregation) are not aware of decisions made in specific programming areas. You have to be an upper-level manager on the staff team in the very large church to have inside working knowledge about decisions being made around the entire church. This adds to the feeling that lay leaders have "lost the church."

In fact, if lay leaders are living into their role, then they are full owners of the mission, discerners of next steps, strategic direction setters, ministry managers alongside the staff, and doers of the ministry. Let's look at how each of these roles is played in the large congregation.

### *Mission Owners*

Denominational polities hold different assumptions about who "owns" the church. However, most mainline Protestant congregations believe that the laity has an ownership voice in the strategic direction of the congregation. Regardless of who owns the building and who can hire or fire clergy leaders, most traditions appreciate that the strategic direction of the church is vested in the members of the congregation. At the beginning and end of the day, it is the membership body that must affirm the vision, core values, and strategic priorities of the congregation. If the laity doesn't affirm the direction of the congregation, no board or staff team can steer the congregation.

In the large congregation the articulation and affirmation of strategy works very much like it does in the smaller congregation. Good strategic questions are framed about the identity of the congregation, and data is gathered to help formulate answers to those questions. Leaders make meaning out of the data that has been gathered and then envision a preferred future.

However, over the years Alban consultants have noticed something remarkable in how congregations of all sizes pursue mission ownership. The leadership body that invests itself in the articulation of mission and vision is typically a group of 75 to 100 leaders. Whether the congregation is multi-celled, professional, strategic, or matrix in size, when an open call is issued to the "leaders of the congregation" about 75 leaders will show up. Upwards of 1,000 members may participate in individual acts of discernment (like participating in a survey or listening group), but those who will engage in collective decision making on behalf of the congregation number between 75 and 100 leaders.

When 75 leaders show up to participate in the decision making of a congregation that averages 150 people in weekend attendance, leaders think that people are engaged. When 75 leaders show up to make decisions for a congregation with 1,200 in worship, leaders think that members have yielded their ownership of the church. This often frustrates those who believe that a larger body of people should be investing in the leadership of the congregation.

This group of 75 to 100 individuals behaves remarkably like the community-size group discussed in chapter 2. This is the group size that can effectively function as a community with a leadership identity. The leaders are sorting themselves into a manageable body of thinkers who are equipped to do this work on the congregation's behalf. Members are not necessarily bailing on their investment in the church. It is a sign that people intuitively know that some people are gifted for more strategic decision making, and some are gifted for more operational or hands-on forms of ministry. The laity is sorting itself according to the work that they do best.

### *Discerners*

Discernment about the mission and ministry of the congregation is happening at all times and in every venue of large church leadership. Lay leaders never need to abdicate their role as discerners of God's movement in the ministry, regardless of church size. What differs across size categories is the arena in which discernment happens. In the large church there are few open forums where members can show up and weigh in on whatever issue may be burdening their hearts. In smaller churches congregational meetings and board meetings are often open meetings, where members can show up to talk about anything they feel compelled to address. Someone in the small or mid-size congregation who is feeling led to express an opinion has easy access to decision makers. In the larger congregation, as we have already seen, decision making is happening in more specialized arenas.

In the large congregation, showing up at an all church meeting to express a random opinion about the budget is no longer helpful behavior. Directions have been so well established by the time a congregational meeting occurs that voting is almost always a vote of affirmation and an expression of support for leadership. A "member at large" is not necessarily encouraged to show up at a governing board meeting to share his inspiration or concern around a particular area of ministry. If board leaders are healthy, the board is working at a strategic level and would refer a

conversation about an operating concern to an appropriate ministry team of the church.

Discerning lay leaders in the large congregation have to be politically savvy enough to understand when and where to register their ideas. They need to share their impressions, hopes, and dreams with the appropriate staff member, or they need to bring those thoughts to the appropriate ministry team for further exploration. Discernment is still very much a part of the role of lay leaders, but the delivery system needs to be thoughtfully targeted if it is going to have impact.

### *Ministry Managers*

The management of ministry in the large church is primarily coordinated by the staff team. However, the staff team does not fulfill the management function alone. Ministry teams of lay leaders come alongside staff members to help shape and coordinate ministry. Ministry teams exist in all size congregations. What is distinct in the large congregation is the role that staff leaders play in shaping the team.

In the large church, staff members often know best who is passionate about and gifted for various areas of ministry. The large church may function with a lay leadership group that officially nominates people to serve on its various committees and teams. However, the staff of the church will have significant input into the nomination process. The effective large congregation yields much of the decision making about individual areas of ministry to staff members, who work carefully in concert with appointed lay leaders to shape the ministry. Ministry teams in the large church understand that they will be most effective when staff coordinates volunteers, not when the volunteers try to coordinate staff.

### *Ministers*

One of the things that first attracted me to my own home congregation was a section at the bottom of the weekly bulletin that listed the various staff roles of the church. For each role the title

of the position was listed, and next to the title was the name of the person occupying the role. At the bottom of the list it said: "Ministers: Every member of the congregation."

I am an American Baptist, and the notion that every member of the congregation is responsible for his or her own relationship with God and for ministry of the church is part of my DNA. Most Protestant congregations operate with some sense of this same notion. The large church is no different from the small church in this regard. A staff team of 25 individuals, or even 50 individuals, cannot accomplish in ministry what an orchestrated group of 800 to 1,000 members can accomplish. Lay leaders are "doers" of ministry when they sing in worship, teach a religious education class, lead a small group, serve a meal to the homeless, donate items to the food pantry, and so forth. You get the picture.

## HOW PEOPLE BECOME CONNECTED

In *The Tipping Point* author Malcolm Gladwell writes about the people who link us up with the rest of the world. He calls these individuals *connectors*, people with a special gift for bringing the world together. Connectors are people who know many others and can quickly build relationships between people, because they manage to occupy many different worlds and subcultures and niches at once.<sup>1</sup>

Faith communities have long relied upon connectors to manage the assimilation of newcomers. The apostle Paul was a connector, building relationships within and between Jewish communities around the Mediterranean that were embracing the teachings of Jesus Christ. Through his letters he created a network of faith communities that understood their connection to one another, even if they didn't personally interact with one another.

Congregations of all sizes rely upon connectors to build relationships among members, to connect new people to existing congregational groups, and to ensure that people know one another. You can spot congregational connectors from a distance just by observing the way they gravitate toward newcomers, move during a meet-and-greet period, and physically bring people together.

In the effective large congregation connectors are found in different roles than they are found in small and mid-sized congregations. Arlin Rothauge first identified the ways in which different size congregations assimilate new members in his pamphlet "Sizing Up a Congregation for New Member Ministry."<sup>2</sup> Rothauge identified that in the small, family-size congregation (0–50 in average weekly worship attendance), the matriarch or patriarch of the congregation makes the connections. In the pastoral-size congregation (50–150), the pastor is the most effective connector. In the program-size church (150–350), the various department chairs and staff members who oversee programs collectively share the connecting function, spotting newcomers and connecting them to programs and people.

In the professional size congregation, the connecting work is most effective when done by the staff team, where it is often coordinated via the weekly staff meeting. The congregation has grown beyond the capacity of any one individual to know and be known by everyone. If the senior clergy person has been in place for a long time and the congregation has grown up around her, she may demonstrate a remarkable capacity to know people. However, it is still the collective staff team that provides the connecting function for the congregation.

Each professional leader on the staff team is responsible for connecting those active participants most closely associated with his or her area of ministry. The youth leader and children's leader may collaboratively track and connect families with school-aged children. The senior adult minister tracks and connects those in the congregation over the age of 65. The music minister connects those who serve the congregation through music. In this manner the professional church manages to keep tabs on its membership. There may be areas of overlap, and occasionally a person falls through the cracks because the person doesn't fit any particular interest or involvement group. The entire system of connection in this size congregation is dependent upon the coordinating capabilities of the staff team.

Once a congregation passes into the strategic size category, the capacity of the staff team to serve in a connecting capacity is seriously diminished. Too many people begin falling through

the cracks. The size of individual ministries may pass the Dunbar number of 150, the number of people that any one leader can reasonably track. (See chapter 2 for further explanation.) Too many participants in the life of the congregation don't fall into the neat classification system formed by staff member ministries. Earlier methods for recruiting people for ministry suddenly quit working. In short, the connection system that has been so adroitly managed by the staff team begins to fail.

In this size category the staff team continues to serve as connectors, but individual staff members become painfully aware that their efforts to connect people are inadequate. When a congregation hits this limit, it needs to begin thinking more systematically about the connection process. The strategic church and the matrix church both recognize that leaders must create a seamless system of acculturation, one that invites every member of the congregation to participate in the connection process. The culture of the congregation must encourage every member to feel responsible for the welcoming and acculturation of others. The process for assimilating into the life of the congregation, and eventually for some to enter into the leadership life of the congregation, must become so transparent that new people can take responsibility for their own integration.

### ASSIMILATION VS. ACCULTURATION

In the 1980s literature and workshops about assimilating new members became the rage in church circles. People were asking, "Why are attendance and membership numbers showing such rapid decline?" Leaders were convinced that better systems of inviting, welcoming, and incorporating new participants into the life of the congregation were a key strategy for reversing declining membership and attendance patterns. Today you'd be hard pressed to find a workshop on new member assimilation. The center of the conversation has shifted, as has the way that we talk about receiving and incorporating newcomers.

In 1988, author Robert Bast identified assimilation as having three components: absorption, integration, and incorporation.<sup>3</sup>

Assimilation was understood to be the means by which a congregation coordinated and blended new members into a meaningful and unified whole. Pastor and author Owen Facey defined *assimilation* as an ongoing process of intentionally bringing, including, and integrating people into the life of the local church, with the goal of equipping and releasing them to serve.<sup>4</sup>

In the 1990s people began to rethink the language of assimilation. As the culture in the United States became more pluralistic and more ethnically, racially, and socially diverse, people began to question whether it was appropriate to use the term *assimilation* in corporate and business settings. Leading thinkers argued that the term *assimilation* had an inappropriate "melting pot" quality that didn't appropriately honor the welcome differences that newcomers might bring. Assimilation suggests one-way adaptation, in which the newcomer assumes the cultural norms of the dominant group. The dominant culture of the congregation is not expected to accommodate any of the unique attributes that the newcomer brings.<sup>5</sup>

Acculturation is a broader concept that more appropriately recognizes the need for both the organization and the individual to mutually adapt to one another. Acculturation is a two-way process of integration in which both culture groups (the congregation and the individual) change to some degree to accommodate the norms and values of one other.<sup>6</sup>

I believe that when we talk about the integration of new members into a large congregation, we need to embrace the language of acculturation, not assimilation. First, it is a more appropriate way of thinking for many of our congregations, those struggling to diversify membership. If we truly want to welcome members who look and think differently from the people already sitting in the pews, then we need to think about new-member integration as a mutual process of acculturation.

Second, one of the strengths of the large congregation is its ability to accommodate greater diversity. People can find others with whom they identify, without the entire congregation having to negotiate every difference in the community all the time. Those who are uncomfortable with difference can avoid it by distancing themselves from the "other." And those who embrace diversity

can find the difference they seek. When people join the large congregation, they don't really join the whole church; they join that portion of the church with which they identify. This makes room for diverse viewpoints and interests to live comfortably side by side. If we want to cultivate a culture that embraces diversity, then we need to view the integration of new members through the lens of acculturation, not assimilation.

This change in perspective ought to have significant ramifications for the way in which we approach the integration of newcomers. What might our welcoming, orienting, and membership processes look like if we are intentionally trying to adapt to each newcomer who arrives?

## SHIFTING ENTRY POINTS

Traditionally, worship has been regarded as the primary venue through which individuals enter the life of a congregation. In *The Inviting Church*, Alban consultants' Roy Oswald and Speed Leas linked new-member assimilation with spiritual growth. They named six levels of incorporation into the spiritual life of the church that progressed in this order: joining, belonging, participating, searching, journeying inward, and journeying outward. Oswald and Leas were careful to explain that individuals might not progress through the six stages in linear fashion. In fact, they argued that the first three steps may be disassociated from the last three. But they nevertheless assumed that people begin their engagement with the church through worship and then move through deeper levels of involvement from there. Here is how they described the progression:

When people are in the process of choosing and joining a congregation, they "get active" in certain ways. They are curious and they begin to explore. They go to church first to worship; they begin to talk with members about their experience at the church; they take inquirers classes, orientation classes, or confirmation classes; and sometimes they get involved in other ongoing church

classes or programs to find out what these folks believe, what people who are members here do. . . .

We found that as members "get in" to the church (this may well be before they formally join the congregation) their needs for belonging and inclusion become stronger than their curiosities and faith questions. After people feel that they have "gotten in," this is usually after having formally joined the church) they look for ways to belong. . . .

Some members move into another phase of involvement (which may not decrease their belonging activities) we call Participation This is a busier kind of taking part. Here people don't just respond when asked, they take initiative. They notice when things need doing and they do what is required. They are most likely on a board or committee, teaching a class, and/or in a position of trust with regard to the church books, money raising, or making sure that church is heated for Sunday morning worship."<sup>7</sup>

A lot has changed in congregational and mainstream culture since Oswald and Leas wrote about assimilation. People have shifted the way that they integrate into congregations. Joining is rarely the first step and may not even enter into the equation. Some would argue that the first three steps today are actually a reversal of the process described above, particularly among the millennial generation. People's involvement is more likely to follow this path: participating, belonging, and then joining.

Some new arrivals at the church begin by participating in the outreach or service opportunities the congregation sponsors. They move from participation into a quest for deeper belonging, where they test out small group involvement or worship, and finally they move toward joining, taking orientation and membership classes much later in their church experience.

This reversal in assimilation patterns is particularly evident in the large church. While many continue to treat weekend worship as the center of church life, others do not. The large church offers so many programming options that Sunday morning worship is no longer the only feeder system of the church. People who are

attached to the church school, a fine arts program, or a recovery program or support group may not be particularly drawn to weekend worship. Nevertheless, these people believe that they are active participants in the life of the church, and they expect that the community will care for them, educate them, and tend to their spiritual needs. They think of whatever pastor they have the most intimate contact with as “their” pastor, and their pastor may actually have minimal involvement in leading worship. They may not be formal members of the church, but they often describe the church as their own.

This phenomenon introduces a number of interesting challenges into the congregation’s acculturation process. In the 1980s our best guess for how to assimilate new members centered almost entirely on Sunday morning worship. We obsessed over the availability of parking and the training of our greeters, ushers, and welcome-table hosts. We tracked participation in worship services and mailed a carefully conceived series of follow-up letters that drew people ever more deeply into the life of the congregation.

For many newcomers, worship remains the primary entry point, and so all those things we worried about back in the ’80s are still relevant. However, if people are not regularly attending Sunday worship, then we need to have integration systems in place that will gather in those who are participating less traditionally. Every ministry of the church needs to have its own method for drawing people more deeply into the life of the congregation. Critical incidents or trigger points need to be identified for flagging people who are expressing an interest in the life of the congregation outside of worship.

## CREATING A CULTURE OF ENGAGEMENT

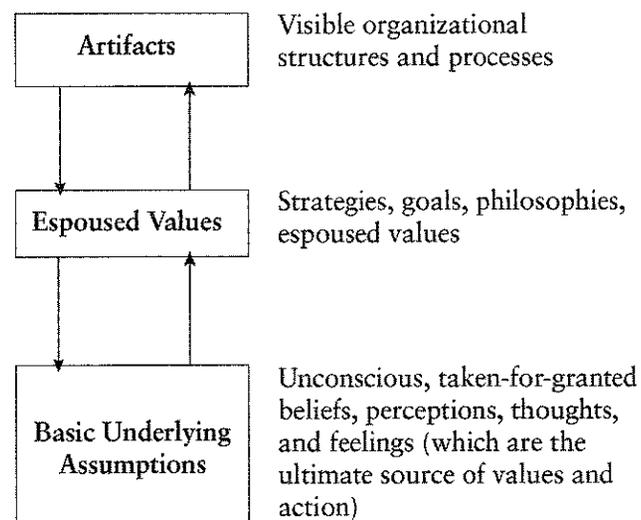
The larger a congregation becomes, the more that it needs to build a culture of engagement, an environment in which every member embraces her part in the welcome and acculturation of new members. Additionally, the overall process for becoming connected to the congregation must be transparent to newcomers, so they can take some measure of responsibility for their own engagement.

Methodist bishop Robert Schnase refers to “Radical Hospitality” as one of the Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations. Radical Hospitality exists when, out of genuine love for God and others, laity and clergy take the initiative to invite, welcome, include, and support newcomers and help them grow into their affiliation with the body. Members focus on those outside of their congregation with as much passion as they attend to the nurture and growth of those who already belong to the family, and they apply their utmost creativity, energy, and effectiveness to the task.<sup>8</sup>

Congregations practicing Radical Hospitality offer surprising and unexpected depth and authenticity in their caring for the stranger. Newcomers intuitively sense this. Churches marked by this quality work hard to figure out how best to anticipate others’ needs and to make them feel at home in their ministries. Members work with heightened awareness of the person who is not present or who is present for the first time.

Creating a culture of engagement is no easy task. Organizational development pioneer Edgar Schein identified three distinct levels of an organization that must be addressed to genuinely create and sustain a new culture. A congregation that seeks to embrace Radical Hospitality needs to tend simultaneously to all three of these layers.<sup>9</sup>

Figure 7.1 Levels of Culture



Nearest to the surface of the culture are the artifacts. These are the collective phenomena that a newcomer might see, hear, or feel when encountering the congregation. These include things like the accessibility of the welcome center, the presence of the usher team, the layout of the parking lot, the attractiveness and clarity of welcome brochures, adequacy of signage in the building, whether members wear nametags, whether they are greeted by the pastor, and the like. A series of classes (perhaps as basic as Membership 101, 201, and 301) are offered frequently in an easy-to-access format. Many congregations tend to these important features, but they mistakenly assume that these artifacts alone are enough to create a welcoming culture. They are not.

An engaging culture must also be reflected at the next deepest level, which is where the espoused values of the congregation reside. A congregation must have a clearly articulated belief system, teaching members why they should feel compelled to welcome the newcomer. Each member should be able to answer these questions. What does my engagement of the newcomer have to do with my own spiritual journey? What is the congregation's philosophy about my role in welcoming and engaging the newcomer? How does it benefit me, the congregation, and the newcomer? The average person in the pew needs to be exposed frequently to the congregation's message about acculturation. Members need to hear it from the pulpit, in congregational correspondence, within small groups, in board and committee meetings, and so forth. The message must be consistent, unified, and ubiquitous.

Finally, the creation of a real culture of engagement requires work at the deepest level where subconscious thought resides. Every member of the congregation carries unstated assumptions in his head about how acculturation ought to work. For example: "If the pastor were doing his job I wouldn't need to do this." Or, "It's up to newcomers to approach me with any questions they may have. I'm willing to engage but they should take the first step." These beliefs are often unspoken, and people may not even be aware that they hold them. However, it is the unstated assumptions at work in the life of the congregation that often undermine leadership efforts to create a more welcoming environment.

A congregation may have an impressive lineup of organizational structures and processes to tend to the newcomer. The congregation may have clearly articulated strategies, goals, values, and philosophies about the work of engagement belonging to the entire congregation. But, if the person sitting in the pew believes, at the core of his being, that the job of acculturation belongs to the staff team of the church, all the other efforts will be wasted. If members believe that "newcomers ought to be able to figure out how to engage on their own, because after all, that is the way that I did it when I first arrived," there is no culture of engagement. Each member must operate with a set of underlying assumptions that supports her involvement in Radical Hospitality, in reaching out to the other.

A culture is truly in place only once the artifacts, espoused values, and basic underlying assumptions of the congregation are in alignment. How does this happen? It happens when leaders work consistently, over a long period of time, on all three levels of the culture. While new processes and structures are being designed, people are being invited to explore their own unstated assumptions about engagement. While the governing board is working on strategies, goals, and philosophies, members are being invited to consider their role in creating a more inclusive and inviting environment.

### *Staff Positions That Help*

Two staff positions that emerge in large congregations are critical for creating and tending a culture of engagement. These positions are the director of communications and the director of membership. They may operate under different names, but their purpose is relatively stable across congregations.

The communications role typically begins as a part-time role in the professional size congregations. It becomes a full-time position in the strategic congregation. In the matrix size church the director of communications often supervises a team of staff dedicated to the communication and public relations function of the congregation.

The need for clear and consistent branding and messaging in the large church is readily apparent. Often the role originates with someone who is asked to coordinate the weekly electronic newsletter and worship bulletin. At some point it becomes imperative to coordinate the messages of those important communication venues with the congregation's website, the pastors' blogs, program flyers, and so forth. The larger the congregation becomes, the more important it is to have an overarching branding and messaging system to communicate a focused and consistent message.

The director of communication can play a significant role in the creation of a culture of engagement. Each of the communication venues of the congregation is an important opportunity to influence the culture on all three levels described above. Communication channels can be employed to help people figure out where to get connected and how to learn more about the congregation. The website becomes a vehicle for interacting with the congregation. People can find out what is happening on the website, and they can sign up to participate in various ways through the website. They can listen to sermons that they missed, and they can register their feelings and perceptions through interactive surveys and data-gathering tools. The publications of the congregation provide the information that people need to make intelligent choices about their own participation. All the communication venues of the congregation can be used to repeat and inculcate the congregation's basic values.

The other staff team role that becomes increasingly critical to the effectiveness of the large church is the director of membership. This role focuses on the welcome and acculturation of newcomers and is often tied to the stewardship and leadership development focus of the congregation. The way in which the role is constructed varies considerably from one congregation to the next.

When the role first emerges, it is almost always placed on the administrative side of the staff team, and it is almost always staffed part-time. The staff member spends most of her time developing a reporting system to track participation and membership and to better manage the welcoming function at weekend worship. The position is usually staffed by a lay member of the congregation who knows a lot of people and cares about the mission of the

congregation. As the congregation continues to grow past the 800 mark, the demands on the staff member become more significant and a greater level of professionalization is required. A more sophisticated program of acculturation must be developed that can guide the footsteps of a first-time visitor from the first point of entry until he is a fully engaged member. In the very large church the person in this role is responsible for the welcoming function, membership classes, and connecting people into meaningful volunteer opportunities. Sometimes the director of membership is housed under the pastoral care arm of the staff team. Sometimes it is treated as part of the discipleship function, and sometimes it is treated as part of a development or stewardship group. The larger the congregation, the less administrative and the more programmatic the role becomes.

In many of the large congregations I've worked in, both the director of communication and the director of membership suffer from an identity crisis. They wonder where they fit on the staff team and exactly what they are meant to be doing. The lack of clarity creates a great deal of conflict (and resulting stress) for the occupants of the role. In fact, the occupants of both positions usually straddle the program and administrative support teams. They must be able to function and move easily as members of both teams.

From a distance, the large congregation may appear to be a place of anonymity and disengagement. The perception may be that people join the large church to hide, and the staff team does ministry on behalf of the laity. In this chapter I have attempted to dispel that myth. The large congregation will always house a body of people who have selected the congregation specifically because of their desire to remain anonymous. But alongside that anonymous body of people is a significant cadre of laity who are working to support the congregation in highly engaged and specialized ways. In the effective large congregation, the staff team knows that they do not exist to carry out ministry on behalf of laity. The staff knows they exist to equip laity in the pursuit of the congregation's mission. In the next chapter we will examine the process of forming and executing the congregation's mission, in a way that fully involves clergy, staff, and laity.

## QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP REFLECTION

1. Think about the involvement of the laity in your own congregation. What are the ways in which the laity of your congregation can express their identity as missional owners, discerners, governors, ministry managers, and ministry participants?
2. Are there areas of your congregation where the laity is excluded from leadership? Is this appropriate or inappropriate, healthy or unhealthy, given the size of your congregation?
3. Connectors are people who know many others and build relationships between others quickly because they manage to occupy many different worlds, subcultures, and niches. Who are the connectors in your congregation? Who are the connectors on your staff team? Are your connectors empowered to facilitate the acculturation of new members? If not, what stands in their way?
4. Does the orientation of newcomers in your congregation focus on assimilation or acculturation?
5. What are the points of entry into life in your congregation, other than worship? Do your methods of welcoming and tracking newcomers take into consideration points of entry other than weekend worship?
6. This chapter identified three levels of culture that must be tended to create a welcoming congregation. What is your congregation currently doing to create a culture of engagement at the level of visible artifacts, at the level of espoused values, and at the level of basic underlying assumptions?

## CHAPTER 8

# Forming and Executing Strategy

WHAT MINISTRY IS UNIQUELY OURS TO DO, AND HOW DO WE STAY FOCUSED on it? This question targets the heart of a congregation's strategic identity. How are we different from any other congregation based on our ministry context, the passion and giftedness of our membership, and what God is calling us to do or become?

A congregation with a strong strategic identity is able to form an effective overall strategy for ministry. A well-formed strategy generally includes a narrative of core identity (or vision statement), a defined set of core values, an understanding of what strengths the congregation seeks to preserve, and two or three agreed-upon areas of new growth. When good strategic leadership is present, the congregation consistently acts in ways that demonstrate the core values, ministers to the community out of the congregation's strengths, and pursues growth in agreed upon areas.

The leadership system that tends to strategy is not as neatly defined as the other four leadership systems that have been discussed in prior chapters. The congregation's strategy must be embodied at every level of church life—in its clergy leaders, on the staff team, among board members, and in the assimilation of new members. Consequently, it is fitting that we visit this leadership system last. In many ways the formation and execution of strategy is the leadership system that brings all of the other leadership systems into alignment.