

Pastor's Report to Council October 2021

Briefly, things for Council to do:

- I. Share thoughts and insights that we can learn from recent experiences
- II. Participate and invite others in conversations
- III. Identify a date for 2nd hour to ground us in key concepts for the journey

And things to know

- IV. A reintroduction regarding my approach and experience
- V. Today's reflection for start of meeting

I. Share thoughts and insights

If you have not done so, please share your thoughts, ideas and constructive criticism in the following areas:

- Music Survey <https://tinyurl.com/2021FCCWMusic>
- Intergenerational Worship <https://forms.gle/JS4ym5cs9cNhHPFd7>
- Union Services <https://forms.gle/ytyP9RaCeaDN5VpTA>

Here is why. I believe that we are called to be disciples, that is life-long learners of this way of love. In good leaders learn, healthy teams pause to reflect, and vibrant organizations continuously adapt and improve what and how things are done to align ever more closely with our purpose.

II. Participate in conversations; Invite others

As we have moved from summer into the fall, we have created several opportunities to grow and think together. Specifically,

- Weekly Bible Study Tues 10:30am in-person and via Zoom
- Pie with Pastor Oct 13 & Nov 3 at 2 pm; Oct 20 & Nov 17 at 6 pm sign online: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/70a044aa9af2ca5fa7-piewith>
- Pumpkins, Pizza, and Pie Oh My – a Family Ministry gathering Oct 24 11:15ish

In addition, I am open to hosting other conversations, especially spiritual explorations related to applying spiritual practices and biblical wisdom to find our way into healthy (healthier) relationship with ourselves, others, creation, and our Creator, i.e., personal and collective transformation.

III. Identify date for 2nd hour

Since arriving, I have alluded to and shares aspects of the spiritually grounded, transformative process that leads to deeper community and a clearer sense of our calling as the body of Christ in the world today. I ask Council to pick a date and encourage people to attend a second hour conversation where I can present some of the key concepts to you and those in the congregation who might be interested.

This will be a pre-cursor to the restructuring conversations as well as the vision and values processes. It will be helpful in connecting the dots regarding how the various initiatives fit together.

Concepts include

- The lifecycle of congregations
- The Body of Christ, Healthier Systems, a Framework for Community
- My spiritually grounded vision and values journey
- Why structure matters and how it can magnify or diminish glimmers of light

IV. A re-introduction

This week marks a year of ministry together. I understand the reluctance and the history of change and restructuring that did not work. I pray that (re)sharing a bit of my experience and approach may give you courage.

My doctoral thesis, which I defended successfully in April of 2016, is entitled: ***“Transforming Community: Dialogue and inquiry as a just and loving way for leading increasingly diverse people beyond fear, loss and uncertainty.”***

The introduction begins with the following:

In my experience, even when theologically diverse congregations, clergy and leaders want to foster vibrant, inclusive community, it is difficult for people to find the courage to navigate difference, overcome fear, forge lasting connections and embrace the future. Relationship is abstracted; difference avoided or homogenized; and conflict of all shapes and sizes used to indirectly work through anxieties, fear and loss.

Despite the challenges, I have witnessed the renewal and transformation of declining and even dying congregations as we intentionally and even accidentally opened to wonder.

Why some individuals, teams and congregations draw strength from challenges; move through fear, loss and historic conflicts; and open up to the emerging possibilities - while others seem to resist - remains the subject of much speculation on my part. The painful challenges I continue to witness, disappointments I experience, and pastoral concerns I hold for the people compel me to search for resources, training and better ways to foster vibrant, just and loving community among increasingly diverse people who are disconnected from a common story.

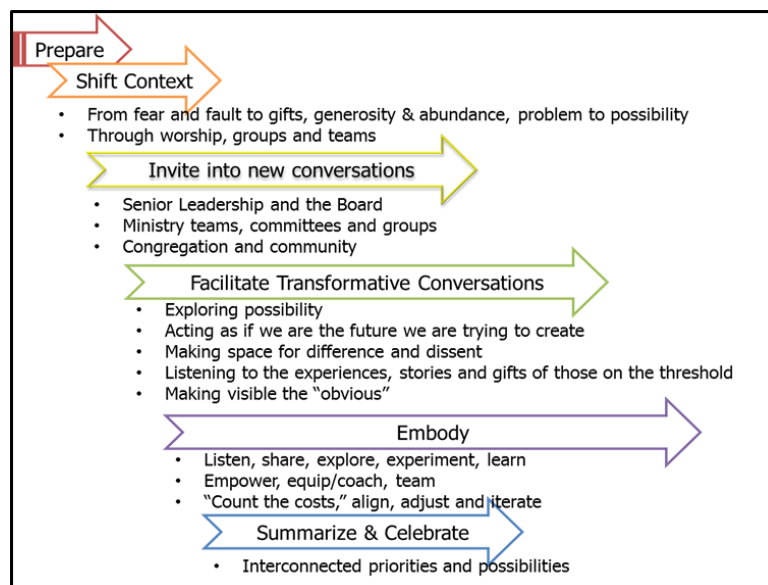
Identifying similar challenges in multiple contexts encourages me to look beyond typical leadership models, church growth strategies or other techniques which in their own way

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unreflectively fail to address mono-cultural presumptions, taken-for-granted norms, assumptions, and success measures.

At its heart is the overarching question: ***how might we lead increasingly diverse and disconnected people through fear, loss, uncertainty and complex change to nurture vibrant, inclusive faith communities?***

For me, transformational ministry is spiritual direction for the Body of Christ. Conversations and conversation partners matter because conversations are the way in which as the body of Christ, we open up to Spirit's presence and find a way when there seems to be no way. As a spiritual director might work with a client to connect with the inner wisdom already present, my approach invites questions, engages conversation, and encourages deeper reflection for congregants and the congregation as a whole:



FCCW is the 7th church that I have pastored in 15 years of ordained ministry. At five of the churches, I led through a process of transformation (4 as an intentional interim and 1 as Executive Pastor). In every congregation competing priorities were addressed, vision and values clarified, and structure aligned in support of the congregation's mission and ministry. The spiritually grounded, conversational process opened individuals and the community up to embrace, experience, and embody the sacred in their midst. Longstanding competing priorities and self-defeating habits, like conflict avoidance, were addressed with love, grace, and hope. And even the most conflicted congregations were able to learn from their challenges and thrive once more. The sixth church is the one that I planted in Chicago.

I am a second career pastor, having spent nearly 14 years as a business consultant helping clients improve processes, implement large scale change, and adapt technologies to shift their cultures to be more relational.

The point is, I bring experience and process that have worked in congregations large (600 in Toronto) and small (40 when I arrived in San Antonio – 150 a year later). And more importantly, in every congregation, the conversations resulted in renewed life, greater hope, deeper community, and a clear sense of purpose.

V. Today's Reflection

Select verses from Mark 4:2-33 The Inclusive Bible

Jesus taught them many things in the form of parables and, in the course of his teaching, said, "Listen carefully. Imagine a sower going out to sow, scattering the seed widely. Some seed fell on the edge of the path, and the birds came and ate it.

Some fell on rocky ground where it found a little soil, and sprang up immediately because the soil had little depth— but then, when the sun came up and scorched it, it withered for lack of roots. Some seed fell into thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it produced no crop. And some seed fell into rich soil and grew tall and strong, producing a crop thirty, sixty, even a hundredfold." Jesus ended by saying, "If you have ears to hear, then listen. "

...He also said to the crowd, "Would you bring in a lamp and put it under a bushel basket or hide it under the bed? Surely you'd put it on a lampstand! Things are hidden only to be revealed at a later time. They are made secret only to be brought out into the open. If you have ears to hear, then listen! "

... Jesus said further, "The reign of God is like this: a sower scatters seed on the ground, then goes to bed at night and gets up day after day. Through it all the seed sprouts and grows without the sower knowing how it happens. The soil produces a crop by itself—first the blade, then the ear, and finally the ripe wheat in the ear. When the crop is ready, the sower wields the sickle, for the time is ripe for harvest. "

Jesus went on to say, "'What comparison can we use for the reign of God? What image will help to present it? It is like a mustard seed which people plant in the soil: it is the smallest of all the earth's seeds, yet once it is sown, it springs up to become the largest of shrubs, with branches big enough for the birds of the sky to build nests in its shade."

Using many parables like these, Jesus spoke the message to them, as much as they could understand.

From Peter Block who says in *Community: The Structure of Belonging*

The context that restores community is one of possibility, generosity, and gifts, rather than one of problem solving, fear and retribution. A new context acknowledges that we have all the capacity, expertise, and resources that an alternative future requires. Communities are human systems given form by conversations that build relatedness... transformation occurs when we focus on the structure of how we gather and the context in which the gatherings take place; when we choose depth over speed and relatedness over scale.