

Getting ready for Renewal

Many churches today are considering their need for renewal. What does that really mean? And where do we begin?

Share and use with leaders as a resource to contribute to – or begin – a conversation.

It starts with God's mission

The mission of the church starts with God's mission:

So, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. (2 Cor 5:17-19).

The *mission* of the church is to discern, celebrate, and participate in what God is doing in the world. The greatest challenge facing churches today is to live *missionally* – to develop missionary sensitivities, vision, and practices for engaging in God's mission. The many efforts churches are making to “keep up” or “survive” are futile if this fundamental challenge is not addressed. This challenge often presents a learning curve for churches. That is why we consider renewal in the church to be a “learning journey” of spiritual depth for congregation leaders and participants together as they discern and embody God's mission anew.

To learn to live *missionally* is to consider congregational life and ministry – inside and out – in light of *God's* mission:

- What would *living missionally* mean for our congregation in its current situation and as it looks to the future?
- Why are we here as the church in this place anyway?
- How would we define “success?”

A time of renewal invites a congregation to become open to the Holy Spirit together, to hear the Gospel as though for the first time, and allow it to examine and convert you into Gospel-like habits and fresh attitudes. Renewal involves engaging hearts and minds with the gift and call of the Gospel for God's mission in these times. It is NOT as much about developing new programs and activities for your church as it IS about re-discovering and cultivating the church's core and life-giving practices. It will be an opportunity to discover

the motivation and energy for being God's "sent" community in very concrete ways in your world.

God's mission has a church

Consider the news you are reading daily on the web, in the newspaper, cable TV news, radio talk, or even the conversation with people you know. It doesn't take long to realize how much our world is in need of a new creation! God's mission is a mission of hope, healing, and reconciliation for the world. And God's mission has a church – a body of people called to a common, singular purpose to proclaim and embody God's New Creation in the middle of the old.

We all want better things for our church's future. If we didn't, we wouldn't be reading this. We wouldn't care. We may be tempted to think it is a bigger parking lot or more vibrant worship that we need, or more focused outreach or more satisfied members. But deep down, we sense we are missing something if these "needs" are the starting point for us. Instead, we now understand, *the starting point is God*. The church, after all, is God's idea, not ours. The church has no mission apart from God's mission to the world.

Instead of starting with our needs, let us start with God: God is powerfully present in our world, actively loving the world and calling a people to share in that work. Imagine your church as a people chosen and called for this purpose (I Peter 2:9-10). Imagine your church existing for this purpose alone. God's mission has a church – your church – and is calling your church to bring the good news of the Gospel into engagement with the deep yearnings and concrete challenges of this worldly setting. Imagine. You are God's "Plan A." There is no "Plan B."

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (I Peter 2:9-10)

Participating in God's reconciling work in the world is not a solo project for isolated individuals. God's reconciling work requires the formation of a *disciple community* – the contemporary body of Jesus Christ, faithfully working, learning, worshipping, and witnessing together so that all might know, believe, and live by the wonderful Good News of Jesus Christ. God's mission has a church. And God's Spirit is forming, reforming and renewing the church in each generation for God's mission in the world.

God's mission has a church because God's loving purposes on behalf of the whole creation do not just fall from heaven – *shazam!* Instead, God's mission gets carried out

through God's active calling, sending, and equipping a body of people to discern, celebrate, and participate in God's mission. And that 'body of people' is you – your congregation.

Renewal, then is about what God is doing. And for the church, renewal involves discovering and discerning what God wants to do through us in this time and place for the sake of the world God loves. Will you join the mission? Will you seek to discover what God is doing anew, what God wants to do through your congregation now?

Underlying assumptions

Here are some underlying assumptions about renewal in the church:

- The renewal and transformation of the church's mission is to be found in God's mission. God who is always doing "a new thing" (Isaiah 43:19) calls the church to discern, celebrate, and participate in God's mission afresh.
- The church, therefore, is called to bring the good news of the kingdom into engagement with the deep yearnings and concrete challenges of its worldly context.
- To engage today's context with the good news requires the formation of a disciple community – the faithful body of Jesus Christ – in both proclamation and practice.
- In many churches this requires a radically new vision, new ways of thinking, and new patterns of behavior.
- Church leaders – lay and clergy alike – can become equipped with skills, support, and resources for leading the journey.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What difference does it make to "start with God's mission" when we are considering how to strengthen and renew our church life and ministry?
2. In your own words, what would you say an invitation to renewal in the church is about?
3. What are your hopes about renewal? What are your fears?