

ARE YOU ON FIRE: Leading Adaptively in a New Day

Shenandoah Presbytery: Catch the Spark 3

Ken McFayden

March 6-7, 2015

Feeding the Fire, Fanning the Flame

Around the Fire: Warm Feelings and Good Stories from the Past

Remember and share good memories from the past pertaining to the following areas of the church's life:

- Membership growth
- New buildings
- Programs
- Pastors and staff
- Volunteers
- Children, teens, and families
- Involvement of members
- Commitment of members
- Healthy church budgets
- Mission--locally, regionally, nationally, internationally
- A confident presence in the community
- A sense of healthy community

Discuss your reflections upon the following questions:

1. When has your “fire” burned bright as a church?
2. How was your “fire” fueled?
3. Who searched for new wood?
4. Who tended the fire?
5. What about the fire and church community encouraged others to *pull up a chair*?

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When the Fire has Died Down: A New Mourning

Identify and discuss the following areas in which your church has experienced loss:

- Membership levels, and particular members
- Aging facilities
- Struggling programs
- Pastoral and staff positions, and particular leaders in these positions
- Volunteers
- Children, teens, and families
- Levels of involvement and commitment
- Money for buildings, personnel, programs, and missions
- Mission initiatives
- Presence in the community
- Confidence as a church and in relation to the community
- General congregational health

Discuss your reflections upon the following questions:

1. What losses are having the most significant impact on your congregation?
2. What effects are these losses having on your congregation? On its members? On its leaders?
3. What song is your congregation most likely to sing at this time in its life?

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The Faces of Mourning

Some Signs of Unhealthy Mourning

- Discounting the value of the past, or acting as if the past is irrelevant
- Ignoring the impact of these losses on our lives, individually and congregationally
- Displacing the anger that naturally comes with these losses, and our grieving, onto members and leaders
- Holding on tightly to what we have left, and circling the wagons
- Threatening to leave if we do not get our way
- Clinging to what is lost and gone
- Trying to re-light “ashes” (*or attempting to reincarnate our beloved leaders and programs of the past in our current leaders and programs*)
- Blaming culture for the struggles the church is facing
- Blaming weather conditions for the challenges we experiencing in starting (or sustaining) a fire
- Fantasizing that if only we can find the right leaders, we can rebuild the “fires” of the past and those good “campfire” feelings
- Blaming members for not being involved or committed enough
- Thinking we can find new firewood right next to the fire circle
- Being stuck, afraid to venture into unknown areas in search of new firewood
- Grieving as those who have no hope

Some Signs of Unhealthy Mourning

- Appreciating the value of the past, and understanding the attachments people have to the past
- Inviting people to name their losses, and honoring the impact these losses have had and are having on them
- Accepting the anger, and a wide range of feelings, that come with loss, particularly in relation to those people, places and things to which we are attached
- Working intently to let go of those things over which we have no control, and resisting the temptation to live in a survival mode that closes us to others (*and closes others to us*)

- Accepting that, with changing circumstances, the church will change
- Letting go of what is lost and gone—It is lost; it is gone
- Exploring ways in which we may relate to our cultural contexts differently
- Understanding and accepting the complexities of leadership—and of followership—and being willing to learn new ways together
- Appreciating that members, and friends of the church, have many commitments—And exploring together how to nurture faith and discipleship
- Being willing to go out, further away from our comfort zones, in order to build relationships with others
(not, if we build it, they will come)
- Grieving as those who **have** hope
- With hope, the capacity to dream again
- With hope, the emergence of new sources of energy
- The capacity to attach anew

Discuss your reflections upon the following questions:

1. How would you describe the state of your congregation as it experiences losses and mourning?
2. How are congregational leaders and members caring for each other amid loss and mourning?
3. How and where do you perceive God at work in the midst of your losses and mourning?

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A New Fire: Resurrecting the Old, Starting Anew

Reflect upon and discuss the following re-centering questions:

- What is your vision for your church in the future? What do you hope it might look like?
- How does this vision of the future align with your fundamental purpose, of *why* the church does what it does?

If we believe that God alone is able to transform the church and world, and if we believe we are called to bear witness to God's transformative work, and if we believe we have the capacity to transform church structures, patterns of interaction, and expressions of mission and witness in church and culture, how might we seek to transform the following dimensions of our life and ministry as a church in a way that remains aligned with our purpose and vision?

- Worship
- Congregational life
- Education
- Communication
- Mission and ministries

Discuss your reflections upon the following questions:

1. What excites you as you envision the future of your church?
2. What is one new thing you might want to try in the future?
3. How can others support and encourage you in this new effort?