

# Equipping for ...

## The Culture of Change



The continuing process of restoring the life, worship, and mission of the church inevitably involves change under the continuing guidance of the Spirit. However, proposing and implementing a change (no matter how small) often mobilizes resistance; which is normal - we all like what we know. Here are some thoughts on the pastoral aspects of change to help leaders and groups as they contemplate and engage in change.

### Vision

- Change in the church is oriented towards the Kingdom of God and not done solely for the sake of change or personal comfort and taste.
- Discern a vision don't impose a desire.

### Insight is important

Be clear within yourselves about the purpose of any change. Be honest among yourselves why you consider a specific change a wise thing or not a wise thing. (Remember, both the desire for change and the resistance to change can be idols we cling to.)

### Energy

Pour energy into building up and creating new things rather than amending and ending current practices or programmes. Sometimes change happens naturally when people get excited about and invested in something new.

### Education is essential

Neglecting to provide adequate education about the theological and practical reasons for a change is one of the greatest hindrances to effective change management. Some well-done, creative, and stimulating education about the themes attending a change in practice or policy is endlessly helpful.

### Communication is key

Understanding in a congregation or system is uneven and it is important never to assume everyone understands the changes being proposed or their implications. Carefully disclose often and in different ways why, when, how, who is involved, what is



expected, how much things will cost, etc. when communicating information about change.

## Timing

- Change, like all good things, takes time; don't rush or force it.
- "Strike when the iron is cold." Sometimes making a change in reaction to a contemporary situation (unless the matter relates to personal safety, etc.) can be complicated, misguided, and even hurtful.
- Too much change at once can guarantee resistance to all change.
- *The Past:* change brings up pastoral issues related to loss, feelings of being left out, and nostalgia. It is important to honour what has been in some meaningful way.
- *The Present:* While it is important to respond to the needs of the present it is also important to remember that the status quo is already responding to some need. Take time to learn from people what a change will mean for them and how it might impact their identity or spiritual practices.
- *The Future:* Change mobilizes anxiety about what the future will look like; work with those who are concerned to identify issues and imagine a resolution together.

## "Decently and in Good order"

Use polity as a helpful guide and a means to accomplishing good work transparently and judiciously with discernment, and not as a weapon or a scapegoat.

## Prayer

Prayer, as an aspect of discernment, is essential. However, prayer and public worship that is used as a means of imposing a view of vision on people may be regarded and resented as manipulative.

## Courage

As you enter into a time of intentional change, remember the language Moses gave to the people of God as they were about to pass into new territory: "be strong and of good courage".

## Faith

Continually work to build trust in relationships and church structures so that when change is introduced people will have justified confidence that things are being done for good reasons and in the best possible ways.

## Hope

Have patience. Nothing is ever completely realized in any one ministry, place or time, so leave room for hope.

## Love

Disunity should never win the day. When any one person or group wins in a contentious situation everyone ultimately loses to some extent. The pastoral relationships that comprise our life together are more important than many of the things in our common life that we feel need substantial or sudden change.

It may not be the front-line of mission and evangelism, but managing your congregation's records and information is extremely important.

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