

*Defusing Fear of Innovations: Facilitating Change in the Church*  
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We live in a milieu of constant change. An often-heard witticism is only one indicator of this contemporary mindset: “There are only two things that don’t change-- death and taxes!” We’ve seen plenty of both in recent days to corroborate that thought. Of course, theologians would quibble, citing the doctrine of the unchangeableness of God, among other constants, but the exceptions suffice to prove the rule. Actually, even those two phenomena themselves are undergoing changes, as technological advances postpone the time of death, and a plethora of tax reform proponents continually put forth their proposals for improving the tax laws. Change is inevitable; but will it always be desirable?

Two commonly occurring factors often produce undesirable changes. The first is unsupervised change, which occurs, for example, when leaders fail to manage their areas of responsibility as carefully as they should. The second is mismanaged change, an illustration of which takes place when mistakes are made in the planning and implementation of innovations or other alterations in the environment. It’s sad that we don’t have to look any farther than the church to see plenty of examples where ministers have tried to implement changes only to see an unnecessary split in the congregation and enormous pain for themselves and their families as well.

Yet, change is at the heart and soul of the Christian life and our calling as leaders in the church. In Reformation theology sanctification is understood to be a lifelong process whereby the believer cooperates with the Holy Spirit in ongoing development toward Christlikeness, which involves in all of us many minor changes and in some of us major changes. As leaders, like it or not, we’re commissioned to bid people to change

and to help others do that bidding. We also have a Biblical mandate to help people grow more Christlike, which involves changing all sorts of lifestyle values and actions.<sup>1</sup>

Herein we confront one of our most difficult dilemmas: we are called to be change agents, but psychosocial research and our experience demonstrate clearly that human beings generally resist change.<sup>2</sup> For many reasons most people do fear change including church people. When everything is changing all around them, especially in their workplace, they sense a need for stability, particularly in the church, the body of Christ, the Son of God, who they associate with such images as a solid Rock, a mighty fortress, and a refuge. “If this gives way,” they reason, “where is stability in my life?” I hear it in their voices and see it on their faces. Change is often painful, and healthy human beings do what they can to avoid pain. Such resistance to change is an expectant antecedent that must be understood and dealt with if a leader is going to effectively facilitate a change, even one that will meet the needs of the people...who, themselves, aren’t so sure, even though the change has been designed for them. The next question is, “How can we manage those changes so the outcomes are most favorable to all involved?”

The constancy of change in our culture and the requirement of church leaders to effectively implement and guide it is a common theme in church circles today. *Current Thoughts and Trends* said that learning to manage change is the biggest challenge for a pastor in these times.<sup>3</sup> The newsletter, *Ministry Advantage*, quoted author and church consultant, Lyle Schaller, who holds that “[t]he number-one issue facing Christian organizations on the North American continent today is the need to initiate and implement planned change.”<sup>4</sup>

One reason for the importance of this subject is undoubtedly the speed of change.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 28:19-20; Titus 2:1-8.

<sup>2</sup> “Dying for a Change.” *Current Thoughts and Trends*, Special Report #5 (1992): 5. Thomas R. Bennett, “Secular Adult Education” (paper presented at the National Sunday School Association 1971 National Leadership Seminar, Chicago, Illinois, October 21, 1971), audio tape.

<sup>3</sup> “Dying for a Change.” *Current Thoughts and Trends*, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ministry Advantage*. Vol. 5, No. 5 (1994):11.

In a conversation with the president of a rapidly growing computer business, the executive said that years ago “long-range planning” was ten and fifteen years or more. Now, he avers, it is three years, with a year and a half being about as far ahead as most who in the computer field, and the many other organizations and individuals who have become dependent on computer technology, including churches, want to plan. These realities indicate the importance of church leaders learning to initiate and implement change effectively as they engage their task in the 21st century. While less urgent and less extensive in some cultures, the need to change nevertheless affects people everywhere.

One aspect of change that presents a challenge to church leaders is the introduction of innovations. A branch of the discipline of communication, called the diffusion of innovations (which I’ll hereafter refer to as diffusion research), has yielded helpful insights into the initiation and implementation of changes that people in a social system perceive as new. Diffusion refers to the process of the innovation spreading out and through the social system. Since a local church and church organizations are social systems, insights from diffusion research are especially helpful for initiating and implementing change in the church including its various organizations. Furthermore, this information is useful in churches globally, for it has always been grounded in cross-cultural research; its propositions and principles function in social systems throughout the world. As we address the subject of outreach in this issue of FOCUS, this body of scientific investigation offers much help for those churches wanting to initiate and implement changes designed to help God’s people engage their mission more effectively.

### **INITIATING CHANGE**

Diffusion research distinguishes between individual and corporate innovation decisions, according to Everett Rogers, one of the leaders in the field of diffusion

research.<sup>5</sup> As church leaders it will be helpful for us to glimpse highlights of these studies' findings first with respect to the corporate dimension, where the initial plans for change take place, then with respect to the individual dimension concerning important elements which must be taken into account for the most effective outcomes to be realized.

On the corporate as well as the individual plane, the innovation process consists of a series of stages which progress in a necessary and predictable pattern. Later stages cannot be undertaken effectively prior to the accomplishment of prerequisite stages.

### **Corporate Innovation Decisions**

What follows applies to all churches which have leaders with the responsibility for making, implementing and overseeing changes in the congregation, i.e., where some form of representative government is operative, where corporate decisions are not usually made by the group as a whole. Such applies not only to the Presbyterian form of government characteristic of historic Reformed churches but, according to Schaller, most Protestant congregations.<sup>6</sup> Within the rapidly growing number of megachurches, which Schaller calls minidenominations, the corporate decisions are increasingly complex but still follow the same steps as do other large organizations.

Before we look at the stages of corporate and individual innovation decision-making as presented in the literature, it is crucial that Pastors, Ministers of Education, Youth Ministers, and other church leaders should ask themselves at least eight essential questions before attempting to implement an innovation in the church they serve, eight questions regarding the subject of change in the church that are usually overlooked. (This is not an exhaustive list. Other important questions should also be asked, but these are very vital, being highly correlated with innovation adoption.) These queries help us

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<sup>5</sup> Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 4th ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1995), pp. 371 ff.

<sup>6</sup> Lyle E. Schaller, *The Multiple Staff and the Larger Church*, (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1980), pp. 27-30.

do the necessary homework. For reasons that will become clear, we must ask ourselves these questions prior to initiating an innovation, even after we are convinced the innovation fits with our church's theology and will produce useful outcomes.

We should also note at this point the assumption of an existing church. A pastor who is founding a new church has much more freedom to establish specific ways of doing what he or she wants done than does the leader of an existing church with a substantial history. This obvious but often overlooked observation is profound and usually at the root of much of the trouble churches have experienced.

In a retreat that the staff of Christ Church of Oak Brook in Oak Brook, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago, had with the staff of a fast-growing startup church, the pastor of the latter told us that the church he founded was unique and that he wouldn't be holding ministers' seminars since leaders of established churches couldn't just go back and do to their established churches what he did from scratch. Unfortunately, many clergy who have attended the pastors seminars that the pastor has since decided to hold, have not made that distinction and have tried to do in established churches what he did in a fresh start, and many church splits have been reported as a result.

Similarly, when pastors begin work at any established church, it is vital that they plan with two perspectives of the people clearly in mind. First, unless they're serving the church they grew up in since childhood and everyone knows them, which is rare,<sup>7</sup> they are considered, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, as outsiders, which raises a trust concern when an issue arises. Second, if the changes the new leader makes are deemed significantly negative by the people, they are going to think, "This isn't what I signed up for when I joined!"

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<sup>7</sup> Even if in such a rare case a minister is serving in his home church, he or she still has much to overcome before being able to implement any innovation he wants to introduce. Recall what Jesus encountered and his response, "And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor." (Matthew 13:57)

## **Eight Essential Questions for Implementing an Innovation**

Answering these eight questions and proceeding accordingly will do much to defuse the fear of change in the church. The first four have to do with the change agent him or herself; i.e., what aspects of the person's character and manner will have a direct effect on the attempt to implement the innovation? The last four questions deal with the nature of the innovation and its context.

1. The first question necessarily addresses the vital trust issue just mentioned, and which will be considered further below: How am I perceived by the people in my church?

- a. What evidence exists that the people sense my love for them?
- b. Do people see me more as a prophet or a priest? I remember a very helpful conversation I had with one of my professors when I was in seminary.

Sensing God's calling for me to specialize in the educational aspect of the ministry, I was highly tuned into and inclined toward the prophetic dimension of the ministry. I was very concerned to teach and help people become engaged in justice issues in the church and community (e.g., Deuteronomy 16:20, "Follow justice and justice alone...") in order to right all the wrongs we could. I was not as engaged in the priestly aspect of the ministry, which in Protestant perception involves pastoral care, sensitivity, counseling, and many other expressions of concern for and helping with people's life struggles. My professor wisely suggested that first focusing on the priestly dimension of ministry would enable me to be more effective in the prophetic work of my ministry.

*Washington Post* writer, Michael Gerson, illustrates this point by referring to the engaging manner of effecting change that Pope Francis has successfully employed in his first year in office.

A year ago, Gerson observes, the prevailing narrative about the Catholic Church could hardly have been worse—pedophile priests, financial misdeeds, the arrest of the pope’s butler,...Pope Francis’ “most important accomplishment so far,” said [associate editor at *The Boston Globe* John] Allen is a “massive change in story” from church in crisis to “humble, people’s pope takes world by storm.” It is a transformation that could be “taught in business school as a rebranding exercise.

This has been more than public relations but not devoid of public relations. Francis has a feel for powerful symbols of simplicity, humility and compassion, such as carrying his own suitcase, washing the feet of Muslim prisoners, inviting the homeless to his birthday party, touching the disfigured...the example of a wandering preacher who touched lepers....<sup>8</sup>

How did this church leader/change agent do in affecting people’s perception of him and the church? In his first year he was named *Time*’s Person (formerly Man) of the Year, a designation given to the man or woman who has done the most to affect people’s lives and is considered most influential in the events of the past year. He demonstrates a Christ-like humility that is winsome and engaging. Is that Christ-like humility seen in me?

Gerson continues.

“[Pope Francis’] path to reform is not changing the catechism,” says Allen. Instead, it is “creating a zone for the most merciful application of pastoral teaching.”

...But the possibility of institutional change is made real and

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Gerson, “Political skills for divine purposes,” *Reporter-Herald*, March 30, 2014, p. 4A.

vivid because Francis demonstrates the possibility of personal change. During his early rise to influence in Argentina, according to [Paul] Vallely [author of “Pope Francis: Untying the Knots”], Jorge Bergoglio was an “unflinching traditionalist” who was “dynamic, strong and very autocratic.” Following a humiliating demotion and profound interior crisis, the future pope emerged as “an icon of radical humility.” It is not a natural tendency. “Humility is a discipline for him,” says Vallely. It is calculated, but not fake.”<sup>9</sup>

Gerson observes, “Francis speaks of mercy with the passion of a man who has received it, and was never the same again.”<sup>10</sup> In so doing Francis offers a great example of pastoral, church leadership: do not change the message, change the delivery. By functioning in love, humility, and Christlikeness, earn the right to be heard and help people become more receptive to what you want to do.

2. Second, whose needs will this innovation primarily meet? Honestly now, am I doing this more for myself or for the Lord and his church? To be sure, we who are leaders in the church receive credit for the good things we do as a matter of course, including the innovations we initiate and implement well. That’s not bad; it’s a nice fringe benefit. Even more, it is part of the encouragement Paul exhorted the church to provide in all 13 of his letters and in the book of Acts. The question we need to ask ourselves in all candor in God’s sight is how much of this is for me?
3. Third, do I have the social capital it will take to implement this change? Remember, as church leaders coming into an existing social system, we are perceived as outsiders, especially from a substantial segment of this

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Gerson, “Political skills for divine purposes,” Reporter-Herald, March 30, 2014, p. 4A.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Gerson, “Political skills for divine purposes,” Reporter-Herald, March 30, 2014, p. 4A.

subpopulation. As business people refer to this phenomenon, they speak of learning the corporate culture. Every social system, e.g., a corporation, a town, a nation, or a church, has a culture which contains norms we must respect if we are to gain the trust of the people and be able to live in and function well in that context. We thus need to gain their trust which, as Erik Erikson explained in his classic text, *Childhood and Society*, is the basis for a relationship. Is not relationship, both horizontally and vertically, at the essence of what the whole covenant community is about? Two key ways that trust is established are through meeting people's needs over time (including caring for them and loving them) and by demonstrating that our values are congruent with theirs, building social capital. Over time trust emerges. It is difficult to overstate the importance of this reality. If people don't trust us, they won't support our ideas for change.

The innovator/change agent/church leader (perceived as an outsider by those in the social system/congregation), must keep in mind the following factors:

- a. No matter how much he or she loves the congregation, unless the leader is a son or daughter of the church, as a leader he or she is perceived as an outsider by those in the social system/congregation and must develop social capital in order to make changes. Social capital is defined as “the network of social connections that exist between people, and their shared values and norms of behaviour, which enable and encourage mutually advantageous social cooperation.”<sup>11</sup>
- b. That social capital linked to trust is both derived and earned.

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<sup>11</sup> Collins English Dictionary - Complete & Unabridged 2012 Digital Edition© William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd. 1979, 1986 © HarperCollins Publishers 1998, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2012.  
<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/social%20capital?s=t> (Accessed 09/09/14)

- 1) Initially it is derived by ordination, appointment from the church judicatories or authorities, by commendation of a respected authority figure or trusted representative of the congregation. The derivation is short-lived and must be earned after “the honeymoon period” is over.
- 2) Earned social capital occurs more and more over time as trust is established. Erikson points out that basic trust is essential to the establishment and continued existence of a relationship. Without this basic trust, innovations cannot be implemented, adopted, and diffused throughout the social system/congregation. I’ve sadly observed bewildered, mostly well-meaning but misguided, pastors and other church leaders wondering why their ideas have been so strongly rejected by their churches. They haven’t taken into account the fact that they have only been there a year or two. Even five years isn’t enough in many cases, depending on the church and the innovation.

An old axiom with much wisdom advised ministers to not do anything new within the first year of their ministry in a given location. That axiom has been replaced with misguided advice. One senior pastor told me shortly after he arrived at the church where he was called that he read a book that said he only had a window of 18 months to make his changes, and he was going to waste no time in doing so. A great mistake, as he shortly found out very painfully!

Does this mean that a leader can only operate “within the box” and can’t ever make any significant changes? Of course not. The issue is how and in what timeframe?

I have observed in the churches I’ve served that each year I could do more, because the longer I was there the more I was trusted. Eventually I heard someone say, “You’ve served here that many years! You’re part of the institution!” In that person’s mind I had moved from outsider to part of the community.

Such a movement occurs sooner or later depending on the subculture, and sometimes it never takes place. My wife’s father was reading the obituaries in the local paper of the small, rural, Southern Illinois community where he and his wife moved after retirement. One notice said the man lived 35 years in the area but wasn’t a resident. Thinking that was strange, my life-long Chicago resident father-in-law inquired about that obituary, and the locals told him that only those actually born there were considered residents!

Some time ago I had a conversation with a minister who understood his position as a non-localite. He explained in hyperbolic jest how he gets his church board to approve his programs: “At the first meeting I put forth my idea with enthusiasm and vigor, and then table the matter; I don’t let them vote on it. At the next meeting I speak against the concept...and it passes every time!”

A related question for those just starting out in professional ministry is, “Is this innovation to be introduced and implemented in the first year of my service at this church?” Mostly for the same reasons as above, if it is anything major, hold off! The first year or so should be primarily spent listening to the people very carefully. We have to learn who these people are we’ve been called to serve and

what are their felt and unfelt needs. Only after we know them and their needs can we most effectively implement innovations that will help them meet their needs. When a new pastor comes into a church and decides he or she is going to replace the pulpit with a music stand and eliminate the cross to make the worship service more seeker friendly, that leader is setting him or herself up for unnecessary trouble that is counterproductive to accomplishing his or her objectives that will nurture and extend God's kingdom. This reality exists regardless of whether or not the change has intrinsic merit.

4. The fourth question is, "Am I perceived as a one who listens carefully?" Really listens?! Can I state in my own words to their satisfaction what they are thinking and feeling? A related question is, "Do I find myself accusing others of not listening, when they are actually just disagreeing with me?"
5. Fifth, is the change I want to implement moral and ethical? Can it be justified by the Biblical criteria, i.e., does it run counter to anything in the Bible that is prohibited?
6. The sixth question can be stated, "Is there a more opportune time for this innovation?" If or when the second question can be answered, "Yes," it still may not be the best time for the congregation. One of many factors could exist that would threaten your idea now, but waiting until a more opportune time could greatly facilitate its adoption, for example, when you can obtain the support of key opinion leaders in the church.

Part of this question involves possibly postponing an aspect of the change. Sometimes not requiring the whole pie all at once means you can have and savor part now and the rest later. Initiate some aspects of the change now and some another time. Being willing to compromise where possible is sometimes wise. Remember, part of Paul's definition of the love we are commanded to perform is

that it does not insist on its own way.<sup>12</sup>

7. Seventh, is this change I'm considering supported by the facts? For example, many church leaders want to change the worship music to attract teen-agers and younger adults, who, they reason, are not only the church of the future, but a vital part of the church right now. This is an admirable concern, but it is usually an unexamined one. They should check into careful research on the subject where they will find that most teen-agers are surprisingly traditional and believe that customary church music is most appropriate for corporate church worship services. This observation is true across the board among youth of many denominational backgrounds. Moreover, by the time many adult church leaders catch on to a popular tune with young people that they think will attract them to worship, the youth themselves now consider that song passé, out of date, and they are not attracted to it any more. As church leaders become increasingly ignorant of church history, they forget a phenomenon throughout time: that only a few of the many musical compositions throughout the centuries have stood the test of time and become classics that enrich the lives and worship of the covenant community.
8. The eighth question we must ask comes from the field of sociology: "Will this innovation uproot and destroy a need-meeting tradition?" Careful research in this field informs us of the place and importance of tradition. As sociologist Tony Campolo has pointed out, everyone needs roots and wings. Roots, are grounded in tradition, and tradition gives us stability. He cites at least seven functions of traditions, or rituals: facilitating a sense of belonging, a sense of stability and balance, developing and maintaining identity, a sense of certainty about life, relief from anxiety and other psychological disorders, making and keeping

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<sup>12</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:5 (RSV)

commitments, and binding the community together by taking what happened in the past and making it present.<sup>13</sup>

- We thus see why many well-meaning but misinformed ministers become entangled in great trouble unnecessarily and cause disruption in the church that diverts valuable time and energy away from their most important tasks, such as outreach, missions, evangelism and witness for Christ.
- Thus, before proceeding with the implementation of an intended innovation, it would be good to ask several hard subquestions regarding any tradition that would be replaced by an innovation:
  - Is this a God-given or a mankind made tradition? (Messing around with the sacraments, e.g., is much different from moving the day of the annual church picnic, though for some people there isn't much difference even on this issue!)
  - What needs does this tradition meet?
  - How does eliminating this tradition shape the future?
  - Is it really necessary that I cancel this tradition?
  - How likely is it that my decision to do away with this tradition will cause a major division in the church?
  - Is it possible this tradition will die a natural death if left alone, and I do the new thing alongside it?
  - How do I implement the “new thing” most effectively? To answer this question we now return to the research in the diffusion of innovations.

Now can you see what we are up against by just coming in and summarily discarding a tradition, which many unwise church leaders are doing? Does this mean that

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<sup>13</sup> Anthony Campolo, “Home Improvement,” lecture at Christ Church of Oak Brook, Oak Brook, Illinois, September 2, 1998.

I'm against innovations? Perish the thought! In my specialized area of ministry, primarily focusing on church education, innovation has been my work for over 35 years. Being on the cutting edge has been an important part of my ministry; this was a major reason I was hired and a major expectation that I would always be producing innovative programs. The crucial and key question is how to do it, and here I've found diffusion research very helpful.

### **The Stages of Corporate Innovation-Decision Making**

The first stage in corporate innovation decision-making is called *agenda-setting*. In this phase a need is identified as well as an innovation that will meet the need. An interesting discovery is the finding that most organizations' innovations are driven by the awareness of innovations being used by other organizations. Thus, more often than not, innovations raise needs. Hence, as a church becomes aware of an innovation operating in another church, a "need" is created in the minds of some for that change. For example, pastors and other church leaders are frequently bombarded by parishioners who have attended another church while on vacation or some other occasion and saw there something they really liked and now lobby for its inclusion at their own church. Further, since the ministry is very vulnerable to fads, pastors and other leaders must have a solid handle on theory and theology in order to avoid jumping or being pushed on to every band wagon that rolls into town. And in some cultures, as in the United States, there's a new one every year.

When the leader does become convinced of a real need, such as the need for a new program to help people communicate the Gospel of Jesus Christ more effectively, he or she and others in charge engage in the second stage of initiation, a *matching* of the need with the proposed innovation to test whether a good fit will occur if the change is implemented. The questions here involve whether the innovation is feasible in solving the organization's problem (i.e., meeting the need) and anticipating any difficulties if it is

introduced. If it looks good, planning and designing the match occurs. In the church this practice is vital, for it protects the church from the faddism that often produces negative effects. Some practices that are “really working” in one place (according to the most vigorous proponents) will “work” there but not in another location due to differences in the two subpopulations involved; other practices do not match and should not be implemented for philosophical and theological reasons. If such a conclusion is reached, the decision not to adopt the proposed innovation occurs, and the process is concluded here. For example, just because liturgical dance is well-received at Church of the Servant, it does not follow that it would “work” or enhance the worship at War Zone Community Church four kilometers down the road. On the other hand if the leader(s) conclude the match is philosophically and theologically good and feasible, the decision to implement is made.

Implementation involves three stages. The first is *redefining/restructuring*, in which the innovation is modified to fit the local church, where the church makes accommodations to most effectively employ the change. Here the innovation loses its strangeness and takes on a more homogenous perception. Only a brief time exists for these modifications. Shortly after implementation, an innovation starts to be perceived as routine and a part of the organization’s tradition. Change then is difficult due to emotional attachment and the feeling of security that routine and ritual provide. An example of redefining and restructuring an innovation is seen in one church’s decision to bring in contemporary music, but modified the genre to largely include the best of traditional hymns set to moderate contemporary music due to the preference of many younger members for the more profound subjects and wider range of emotions in the traditional hymns.

As the innovation is introduced and put into use, a clarification of how it is helping accomplish the organization’s purpose, mission and other values and benefits is

necessary. This *clarifying* stage serves to strengthen commitment to the change and reduce misgivings. The failure to engage in this process of helping the members to see the meaning and value of the innovation, can result in the eventual abortion of the innovation, as frequently occurs. If you hear of a church making a change, wait a while before copying it. Check back in a year or two. I walked into a church recently that had begun a new form of worship and within five minutes I was informed by a member that the church would be “rid of it” in three more months! Many innovations that are implemented, touted in print and in seminars, don’t last very long.

Finally, when an innovation has become established in the regular life and work of the organization, it loses its perception of being strange. In this *routinizing* (i.e., becoming routine) stage it is seen as an integral part of the ongoing functioning of the system. Here, too, a decision to discontinue the innovation can be made. It is here that the leaders must carefully consider and act upon insights from the diffusion research which reveal characteristics of innovations and the individuals in the social system who are being asked to adopt the change.

### **Individual Innovation Decisions**

Operating simultaneously with the three implementation stages in the corporate decision-making process just described, are the factors comprising the individual decision-making concerning the innovation.<sup>14</sup> One of the most useful insights from the research on the diffusion of innovations is the understanding that the decision of whether or not to adopt an innovation is part of a process that occurs over time, rather than an immediate act. Furthermore, five key stages are also identified in individuals’ consideration of such changes, and within this process certain kinds of communication have been found to be more effective than others in facilitating a decision to adopt.

A church leader who wants to initiate a change by introducing an innovation

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<sup>14</sup> Rogers, in a phone conversation with the author on January 22, 1996.

should bear in mind that an innovation is an idea, a service, a program or an object which is *perceived* as new.<sup>15</sup> Even if the leader doesn't think of the change as being new, even if it is something that has been in existence for a long time, if the people in his or her church aren't familiar with it, and it is new to them, it is a definite change and carries with it the dynamics of change. These dynamics, some of which involve elements of uncertainty, fear and threat, more for some people and less for others, must be carefully considered and the implications acted upon if the change is to be successfully implemented.

The first phase of the innovation-decision process for individuals is the *knowledge* stage, where the person obtains information pertaining to the existence of an innovation and some understanding of how it functions. Mass media and group meetings are typical means of such communication and are especially useful when a felt need exists among the members of a congregation. Regarding innovations, such as the leaders' desire to implement a contemporary worship service, where the church as a whole does not yet sense a need for a change, the information produced should not be expressed in language of fiat and permanency.<sup>16</sup>

The second stage, *persuasion*, is where a person forms a favorable or an unfavorable attitude toward the proposed change. At this stage the individual is especially receptive to the influence of members of the congregation who are opinion leaders. Opinion leaders may or may not be appointed or elected to any official position in the church, but they are usually long-time members who are trusted and highly respected. The wise church leader who wants to facilitate the adoption of an innovation will at his or her earliest opportunity meet one-to-one with the opinion leaders in the congregation and enlist their support.

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<sup>15</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ and F. Floyd Shoemaker, *Communication of Innovations: A Cross-Cultural Approach*, 2nd ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1971), p. 19. Rogers, p. xvii.

<sup>16</sup> See below the discussion on triabability.

I remember one especially helpful opinion leader in a church I served. He was a life-long and greatly valued member of the church, related to the founding families, and one of the people to whom the others looked for validation and legitimation of anything new. He was cosmopolitan in his perspective and well-educated, which facilitated his openness to innovations. We received and used his support and that of other opinion leaders. This support was instrumental, humanly speaking, in obtaining the change we wanted.

One vital caveat is in order. It is important to consult with opinion leaders who are respected by the church as a whole. Avoid what I have termed “the Rehoboam syndrome.” Rehoboam was the son and successor of King Solomon. As told in 1 Kings 12 and 2 Chronicles 10, Rehoboam went to Shechem, a key city in the region of the northern tribes, and met with them to be made king.

When he arrived the people of Israel said to him, “Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you.” (2 Chronicles 10:4) Rehoboam told them to go away for three days and then to come back and he’d give them his answer.

As he considered his answer, he turned to the elders who had served his father, Solomon, for their advice. They told him that if he served them kindly and gave them a favorable answer they would always serve him.

However, Rehoboam rejected the advice of the elders and turned to his peers, those who had grown up with and were serving him. When he asked their advice, they said, “Tell these people who have said to you, ‘Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but make our yoke lighter’—tell them, ‘My little finger is thicker than my father's waist. My

father laid on you a heavy yoke; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions.” (Vss. 10-11)

The text then says that Rehoboam followed the advice of his peers and answered the people harshly, reiterating that he rejected the advice of the elders. It also mentions twice that the king didn't listen to the people, even that he refused to listen, evidently a leader behavior found in those times as well. (Vss. 15-16) The result? Rehoboam lost the northern kingdom with its 10 tribes and was left with only the two tribes that constituted the southern kingdom.

Here we see a precursor of a common contemporary phenomenon in our postmodern period of history: leaders spurning the wisdom of those older and listening rather to their peers who function with the same level of understanding as they have. Consequently many continually make decisions that are counterproductive to the church as they seek to “reinvent the wheel,” and repeat mistakes from which their forebears learned many years ago and long to spare their younger contemporaries and the church, if these so afflicted with the Rehoboam syndrome would only ask.

The next phase of the process is the *decision* stage. At this point an individual makes a choice to either adopt or reject the innovation. Most people will not adopt without a probationary period in which they can experience the change with the promise they will have the opportunity to go back to what they had before if the new turns out to be worse than the old.

Hence, we leader/minister/change agents must cap our desire to press for permanent adoption at first. We need to work initially to achieve acceptance on a trial basis.

This approval initiates the *implementation* stage, the phase during which an innovation is put into effect. The change is now no longer just on paper and in the mind; it is put into practice and involves altering behavior. Depending upon the nature of the innovation, people often make modifications in it during this stage. Since people are not omniscient and are unable to foresee all the implications of changes, and how they will feel about them, problems often occur at this point. Moreover, in organizations, including many churches, a significant number of people do not tell their leaders about these problems...until they have the chance to vote again. This stage can be the final stage in the process, but it frequently is followed by one more.

People often seek to reinforce their decision to do something new. Most everyone has heard about and many have experienced the phenomenon called buyer's remorse. When a major decision such as the purchase of a home or car has been made, it is not uncommon for the person to awaken the next morning and regret what he or she did. Such misgivings are part of many other innovation decisions as well, and when that occurs the adopter seeks reinforcement or *confirmation* of the decision to adopt or reasons to reject the action taken.

I recall one major change I facilitated in a church. We succeeded in obtaining the adoption of the change, and we gladly but wrongly concluded that this issue was settled and we could focus on other areas that needed our attention. At the next congregational meeting we were surprised and disappointed to see that many adopters in continued reflection during the confirmation stage reversed their decision. If only I'd known of this research at that time! It is an illustration of how important it is for leaders to keep an ear to the ground in order to reinforce decisions once they are made. When done in the light of what we've been considering, especially when the motivation is to meet the needs of the people and not the needs of the one(s) in charge, this is not manipulation; it is leadership.

In megachurches and others which have a polity that limits the degree to which individuals vote on an innovation, the danger of such a reversal is minimized but not removed. For the members have other ways of voting, e.g., with their feet and wallets. Yet, even more importantly, out of love for others, it is always warranted for the leaders to be sensitive, loving, and caring concerning how changes impact those who are affected. Many wise leaders initiate follow up contacts with their members, especially but not exclusively the opinion leaders, inquiring as to how certain decisions are being received and experienced; not a few have at least made modifications, if not substantial revisions, in the innovations that were implemented.

### **IMPLEMENTING CHANGE**

We have already observed several ways of implementing changes that occur in the innovation-decision process. However, other procedures exist as well and are very helpful.

Our work as change agents should begin and proceed throughout with prayer. The Apostle James said, “The prayer of a righteous man [generic] is powerful and effective.”<sup>17</sup> From God’s omniscient perspective he can see what we can’t. He who loves his people will guide us to help them adopt the innovations which will be in their best interests, and accomplish his purposes, and enable us leaders to meet needs, avoid manipulation, and facilitate the changes which should be made. Pray that the Lord helps the people and us, their leaders, to make the changes we all need to make.

We will also be aided by the diffusion research which has identified five attributes of innovations which are correlated with their adoptability. The first is *relative advantage*, which is the degree to which an innovation is perceived as better than that which it replaces. What is at stake here is not an objective component of worth, nor the

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<sup>17</sup> James 5:16b.

leader's or change agent's opinion, but the opinion of the potential adopters as to whether the change has merit. The leaders of your church can be absolutely convinced it would be better for all if you bring bands and projection screens into the worship service. Yet if most of the members, including the opinion leaders, can't see the advantage *to them*, the innovation will be ultimately rejected, one way or another.

To the degree to which potential adopters view an innovation as having *compatibility* with their felt needs, values, and previous understandings, that change is likely to be accepted. In that church I referred to earlier, which first adopted then rejected an innovation decision, this compatibility factor was apparent to the leaders and to others in the first three stages, but in the implementation and confirmation stages the members found the innovation incompatible with their lifestyle schedules and other values, so they rejected the change.

Recall the Apostle Paul's skillful use of introducing the innovation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Athenian Aeropagus as recorded in Acts 17:22 ff. "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown, I am going to proclaim to you." Right away, in the beginning of his presentation, he establishes the commonality of his and their value of worship. Notice also that in this same speech, Paul quoted from Greek poets, using another means of establishing compatibility.<sup>18</sup>

The use of the language of a culture, but adding Biblical and church denotations and connotations, to teach the message of God's Word and its applications is a form of compatibility that is called contextualization in missiology, the study of Christian missions. Especially for those of us who were not born and raised in the church we're

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<sup>18</sup> In verse 28 he quotes from Epimenides, Cleanthes, and the Cilician poet, Aratus. Lewis Foster, "Acts" in *NIV Study Bible*, Gen. Ed. Kenneth Barker (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1985), page 1680.

serving or even in the community and subculture in which that congregation exists, it is not always easy to learn (in particular some connotations and nuances) and use all the local jargon correctly in the people's minds, but it is very helpful to do so as much as possible. When we do, it may be necessary to provide further information as to the Biblical meaning and implications of certain jargon or terms, as Paul did with the men of the Areopagus. (Acts 17:23)

In implementing a new program for outreach, or that will facilitate outreach (a highly valued calling in the church), use sermons and other teaching opportunities that highlight the Lord's Great Commission (Matthew 28:19 and 20) and Peter's exhortation to always be preparing ourselves to witness with gentleness and respect. (1 Peter 3:15) Such an approach will help people see the compatibility of the innovative program with their previously held value of God's Word.

As I also mentioned, if an innovation can be tried without commitment to it being an irreversible decision, it will usually be adopted more quickly. New ideas presented with *trialability* and the possibility of returning to previous practice are perceived as less risky.

Closely associated with trialability is *observability*. The easier it is for an individual to see the results of an innovation, the more likely he or she will adopt it. This factor and trialability are especially helpful in facilitating change. For something new you are planning, can you demonstrate it, encourage people to visit a place where they can see it being used well, or show a video of how it functions?

It is during the persuasion stage that the characteristics of innovations are most influential. These four we've just considered are highly correlated with adoptability.

The fifth characteristic, *complexity*, is negatively correlated. The degree to which potential adopters perceive an innovation as being difficult to understand and/or use is the likelihood of that change being rejected. In presenting an innovation, it is important to

keep the explanation as simple and concise as possible.

Implementing change also involves the careful employment of opinion leaders during the implementation and confirmation stages. Another benefit to bringing in opinion leaders early and giving them some ownership in the decision to initiate an innovation is that they then have a vested interest in helping follow through and overseeing the successful completion of the change process.

Those of us who are ministers and other staff leaders, who have come in from outside the church, are seen by the local members as different from them, more or less, with regard to personality, social characteristics, and ideas among other factors. The more we can demonstrate that we are similar to the members of the church we serve, the more they will trust us and be receptive to our efforts to effect change.<sup>19</sup> Such similarity is called homophily (literally, love of the same) in the diffusion literature, and is an illustration of what the Apostle Paul meant when he said, “I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.”<sup>20</sup>

While serving Reformed Churches and organizations in Western Michigan, which had a majority of people in them whose ethnicity was Dutch, I was somewhat suspect by not a few people, especially since Seely is not a Dutch name, and I was from the East in the New York City metropolitan area, not considered conservative enough for many. However, one day I was discussing this difference with a very Dutch church member, and I said, “But I married a Turkstra.” “Oh!” He said, “and a Fries!!” (Pronounced “Freece”) This fellow rejoiced that my wife’s family had come from the same province, Friesland, in The Netherlands that he and his family had come from, and he explained that the ending of the name “stra” indicates that place of origin. Well, now all of a

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<sup>19</sup> Rogers (1995), pp. 18, 19.

<sup>20</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:22 (NIV). See the whole context, verses 19-23. Note also Paul’s skillful use of homophily in his proclamation to the Areopagus, as recorded in Acts 17:23 and 28, referred to above (p. 17) in his demonstration of his compatibility with the men of Athens. For other Biblical examples of homophily see Acts 16:3; 21:23-24; 22:2.

sudden I was much more acceptable and trustworthy with this strong homophilic connection.

One of my colleagues at the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship reported on a conversation between two women after a church service in the New York metropolitan area where an older woman lamented what she perceived as a sad state of affairs due to all the changes in the church, in particular involving contemporary worship. Searching for a response, one of our younger student assistants, Becky, asked the woman if she knew Psalm 42 in Dutch. The woman replied, “Of course.” Becky, also knowing the psalm in Dutch, began to sing it with the older woman. Afterward, the older woman’s perspective had profoundly changed, and she left the conversation smiling. How do we account for this significant transformation?

Becky demonstrated at least two key diffusion principles: First, she established *homophily* with the older woman. She showed how alike she is with the older person (another woman), singing (a highly affective and emotive activity and one only done with those of kindred spirit) together in Dutch (their common heritage) by memory a Psalm (part of God’s Word). Secondly, Becky, knowingly or not (it doesn’t matter), demonstrated *compatibility*<sup>21</sup> with the older woman’s deeply felt needs, values, and previous understandings. Becky linked especially with regard to the other person’s values. In their common church, which has a Dutch heritage, the Bible is cherished most highly as the Word of God. Memorizing not only the Holy Scripture (Psalm 42), but also in the Dutch language, is highly valued. In addition the older woman sensed in Becky that the younger generation is adopting its heritage, thus assuring the greatest hope and relieving the greatest fear of older generations of Christians. Further, singing together dissolved misperception and negative affect and cemented a new bond formed and confirmed by awareness of their compatibility with their most cherished values.

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<sup>21</sup> See above, pp. 18-19.

Implicitly the older woman perceived that Becky and all she represented are acceptable, because the most important values are in place; the rest, though not fully understood, cannot be bad and indeed must be essentially good.

Of course the people we serve expect us to walk the high road and model Christlikeness, part of the righteousness of which James spoke. The more we “walk the talk,” the more credible and trusted we become, and the more homophilous with the values of the church we are called to lead.

### **Discerning Adopter Differences**

But how do we exercise homophily in the most specific and effective ways possible? With whom? For people in a social system are different. In fact diffusion research reveals five different types of adopter categories in an average social system, which would include a church.<sup>22</sup> It helps to understand these five categories by viewing them as on a continuum that lies between what researchers call cosmopolites on the one end and localites on the other; they form a bell curve percentage wise.<sup>23</sup>

Cosmopolites are people in the social system who are well educated, who travel, and who read widely. They are aware of other cultures and value many of the perspectives of other people outside their social system. They feel enriched by engaging ideas from those outside their circles. Localites, on the other end of the scale and on the contrary, have had less formal education, don't travel much if at all, and do not read widely. They feel much more comfortable with their traditional viewpoints and relationships. They relate mostly with family, extended family, friends, neighbors, and fellow workers who tend to think like they do, i.e., with whom they are homophilous.

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<sup>22</sup> Rogers, in a phone conversation with the author on January 22, 1996.

<sup>23</sup> Rogers (1995), pp. 262-270.

Many churches are ethnocentric which makes it difficult for outsiders to “fit in.” That same ethnocentricity mitigates members’ reaching out on mission for Christ to those from other backgrounds. The ethnic orientation does not preclude such outreach but in most cases slows it, and the adoption of new outreach programs, significantly, as does intermarriage.

Many churches are interrelated family wise as well. The first day I began service at one church I was informed that virtually the whole congregation was composed of the extended families of three founding families. The person who told me this information did so as a friendly warning: “Don’t ever say anything behind any of our backs,” he said, “you’ll be talking to a relative.” While I don’t do so for other reasons, the caveat gave me insight into the corporate mentality of the church I was beginning to serve.

The localites present the greatest challenge to the outreach of the church. They are not eager to reach out to or welcome new people, especially those they perceive as different in ways important to them (those with whom they see little or no homophily). The senior pastor and I at one church, after working diligently for two years to initiate and implement a new outreach program, were disappointed to hear an account of what occurred one Sunday morning. One of the couples who were greeters that morning, and who were direct descendants of one of the founding families, told a young couple just coming into the narthex that the church had enough people and didn’t need any more members!

Between these two polar opposites, cosmopolites and localites, lay the rest of the social system, in our case church members, who share more or less of these perspectives depending where on the continuum they distribute themselves. Church leaders will do

well to understand these groups of people and emphasize their homophily with them when presenting innovations they hope the people will adopt. These groups are not classic textbook types; given individuals may share characteristics with more than one group, but generally speaking, most people within the system or church will identify with most of the orientations of one of the five categories.

Who, then, are these people, and what are they like? The first 2.5% of the social system's, or church's, population are called *innovators*. Innovators are those who regularly enjoy finding or constructing and implementing new things. They include those in the social system who are very cosmopolite and those, for example ministers, who come in from outside the system. These people are venturesome and willing to take risks. Innovators' reference groups are more likely to be outside rather than within their social system. A considerable number of the localites perceive the innovators to be "outsiders." Hence, they are not fully trusted and are sometimes viewed with suspicion, all the more reason innovators should look for ways to be homophilous with each category of people in the social system/church. They tend to be part of organizations that they perceive are similarly minded and engaged in common occupations and pursuits that transcend the local geographical jurisdictions. I remember an elder in one Midwestern U.S. conservative church I served who, when he found out I was from the "liberal" eastern part of the country, sneered, "How did you find your way out here?" The way he said it, an image of myself as a giant spider crawling across the Detroit River into Michigan emerged in my mind. I smiled and explained my origins and travels, trying to connect with values we shared. It took several years, but gradually we grew to like and respect each other.

The next 13.5% of the social system/church are referred to as *early adopters*. These people are the most cosmopolitan of the localities, having had more exposure to the world outside the system, more years of formal education, a more favorable attitude toward taking risks, a higher socioeconomic status, are less dogmatic, and tend to relate more to the innovators than do later adopters. Yet, they have the respect of the rest of the population. It is this category where most of the opinion leaders are to be found; the others view them as role models and approach them to see if an innovation is worth considering. Thus, these opinion leaders are crucial to the implementation of innovations in the church.

Very significantly, and contrary to prevailing opinion, age is not a predictor of early adoption. Rogers states, "*Earlier adopters are not different from later adopters in age.* [Italics his] There is inconsistent evidence about the relationship of age and innovativeness; about half of the some 228 studies on this subject show no relationship, a few show that earlier adopters are younger, and some indicate they are older."<sup>24</sup> Thus, we can't write off the older people as enemies of change or assume that younger people will come on board quickly or even want the change at all, as we noted above.<sup>25</sup> Depending on the change, many older adults are often more open to innovations than many middle age people.

The following 34% are the *early majority*. These people are very deliberate in their thinking. While they interact frequently with others in their circles, they are not usually found in leadership positions, yet situated between the early and late adopters, they are a key segment of the population in the innovation-decision process. They are the

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<sup>24</sup> Rogers (1995), p. 269.

swing group: once they are “on board” with an innovation, the rest of the church not only perceives that half of the membership favors the new thing, but it is the half that are especially well respected.

A very important aspect of the early majority is their deliberateness. They take their time making decisions, considerably longer than the innovators and the early adopters. Therefore, it is very important that ministers and other change agents in the church not rush these people. Be patient. Keep the long-range perspective. Don’t pressure these people, or others. We are not here to manipulate them but to meet their needs. If this innovation will serve God’s purposes, he will use our careful attention to these details and the related matters herein presented and work in the hearts and minds of the people to bring about the change. We must respect them, the process, and God’s perfect timing.

Following the early majority are the next segment of the church population, the 34% who constitute the *late majority*. A key characteristic of these folk is that they are skeptical. They are very cautious and refuse to “fall in line” until most others have done so. Persuasion is possible; they are intelligent people, but the urging of peers is usually necessary before this segment of the church, also people who love the Lord as we do, will accept the innovation. With these persons also, be patient! Hang in there and don’t give up. Employing the concepts above, love and keep trying to help these people to understand why it is best to adopt the innovation. (It would also be good to explain all this to your spouse.)

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<sup>25</sup> See pp. 8-9.

Finally, the last 16% to adopt something new are referred to as the *laggards*. Admittedly a term not well suited to science, which purports to be objective, the term should not be used pejoratively. These people are God's people, redeemed by Christ's passion and death, and are trying to preserve the treasures of the past, which they feel too many others are willing to ignore or jettison.<sup>26</sup> They are the most localite in their outlook and base many if not all their decisions on precedent, past practice. One of their favorite expressions is, "It's never been done that way." In fact, by the time laggards do decide to accept an innovation, innovators and early adopters are frequently implementing another innovation to replace the one the laggards are just buying into!

Thus, many churches have some people who resist change regardless of whatever we try to do. Some of these people have considerable influence as well. However, I have found in over thirty-five years of ministry in the church that it is frequently possible to outlast the opposition. This is another reason why careful research reveals that long-term pastorates are usually more effective. Moreover, such people are often fearful of change, and by building a relationship with them and demonstrating the love the Apostle defines in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, that fear can subside and then objectives can be achieved.<sup>27</sup> Jesus said, "Love your enemies," which covers those who oppose us in the innovation-decision process.<sup>28</sup>

Following these procedures in church ministry, I found that there was no new innovation I wanted to implement that I couldn't produce, but not necessarily when I first

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<sup>26</sup> This term has been modified by others. For example Estep uses the word "stragglers" to replace laggards, an improvement though not without negative connotations in *Management Essentials for Christian Ministries*, Michael J. Anthony and James Estep, Jr. (eds.), (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), p. 205. I would suggest a term such as "final adopters" or "later adopters."

<sup>27</sup> 1 John 4:18, "Perfect love drives out fear."

<sup>28</sup> Matthew 5:44.

wanted to do it. On occasion I had to pause in the process and initiate some enabling objectives, build trust, explain a rationale, and work on other programs for a period of time. “Wait,” as the Psalmist said, “on the Lord.”<sup>29</sup> Keep in mind that we live in a culture that does not value patience. This Biblical value is countercultural in our milieu but crucial in ministry.

Finally, it is important to monitor innovations after they have been adopted and routinized. Innovations often have consequences that were unforeseen in the planning stages, and these unexpected outcomes are not always positive. As leaders we have the responsibility to monitor the changes we’ve been instrumental in producing to make sure the Lord’s people are being served well and that his purposes are being accomplished.

Let us pray for the wisdom to skillfully integrate careful scientific inquiry with the eternal Word of God in order to maximize the probability that the new changes we are initiating and managing will produce the positive results as planned. Use these insights from research in the diffusion of innovations together with the prayerful guidance of the Sovereign Lord. As we read in Proverbs, “Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed,”<sup>30</sup> but not at the cost of rendering asunder the body of Christ. Remember Paul’s rationale when exhorting the Corinthians concerning the matter of speaking in tongues; it applies here as well: “For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.”<sup>31</sup>

### **Implications and Applications**

At the essence of the issue of innovations in the church is ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church, specifically the underlying assumption of whose church this is that

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<sup>29</sup> Psalm 27:14.

<sup>30</sup> Proverbs 16:3.

we are serving. First, foremost, and ultimately the church belongs to Christ, not to the senior or solo pastor or to any of the staff, including those into empire-building. The congregation is the body of Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:27) “Of” denotes the genitive of possession. This reality again indicates Christ is the owner.

Further, the people are the church; they will be there long after the staff leaves; and they belong to Christ the Head of the church. (Ephesians 5:23) We who are called to be leaders to serve the church are in fact its servants. (Matthew 20:28) This key insight is often forgotten to the leader’s peril. (And to his family’s and the church’s as well)

Unless constant and diligent intervention by its leaders occurs, institutions, even those who start out with a servant mentality, become self-serving. Unfortunately for all concerned, the leaders themselves often lose sight of their servant calling. Especially in the church, when a leader, consciously or unconsciously, switches his or her perspective as serving the organization to being served by the organization, the scene is set for disruption and disharmony, key negative dynamics that hinder the desire for and implementation of innovations. People are more inclined to help their leaders when they sense their leaders care for and are helping them.

Therefore, as leaders in the church, we must set as a high priority keeping a servant mentality. It would be good to ask at least two other people who have the ego strength to tell us the truth in love through periodic “reality checks” whether in fact we are still perceived by the congregation as doing so.

In the light of diffusion research, who in your congregation are the people you want to serve on your Worship (Planning) Team? That is, from what segments of the

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<sup>31</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:33

congregation do you want to draw? How much representation do you want from each segment? (E.g., probably not all Innovators or even Early Adopters) Are there any segments you don't want represented? (E.g., Laggards) Don't automatically exclude the "laggards." God loves them too. Furthermore, they love the Lord and his church. By inviting them on the team, they will bring needed insight and wisdom to the discussions; learn the perspective of the others on the team; develop their relationship with the other team members, including those who are in earlier adopter categories; and they will carry insights they obtain from the team to their cohort in the congregation, thus possibly facilitating adoption of the innovation.

An important insight in working with the "laggards" is to not "paint them all with the same brush." It is valuable to have one or two on the team, but it matters greatly who those two are. Are they people who will listen? Do they care about other people and relate well to others? Are they teachable? Especially if the "laggards" in your congregation are well-organized, well-connected, and vocal, it would be good to have some representation on your team. Their very representation on the team speaks volumes to that segment of the social system/church. If you are careful in your selection, you may very well have some pleasant surprises as to their growth in perspective and changed attitudes that lead to lessened opposition to change and maybe even support for the innovation! Such a development is not impossible, and it has occurred.

### **A Prayer for the Change Agent**

Most Holy and Most Gracious Father, please grant to me the courage I must have in order to introduce and facilitate this and other changes the church needs to make, some of which even I don't want to make but which must be done. Please give me the knowledge, wisdom, and guidance to do as you would have me do, and when, in order to function effectively. Please help me to enable those brothers and sisters in Christ who oppose me to feel valued and to see why I still believe they are needed. Please give me the desire, the love, and the gentleness to continue to try to enable those who disagree even vigorously to understand why the change is needed; help me not to give up on them. Please help us all to function more in Christlikeness. O God, thank you for always making your presence and your all-sufficient succor evident, including for guiding me to decide what was right to do and enabling me to keep moving forward to see it through. Most of all may all these efforts to implement this change be pleasing to you, glorify you, and accomplish your redemptive purposes in this matter. Amen!

### **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. Think of something new that you would like to do in the church you are serving or would like to serve. How will the above principles from diffusion research help you implement your innovation?
2. What is the first step you'll take to try to implement your innovation? (Find and talk with opinion leader[s].)
3. Whether you have the gift of evangelism and are intending to serve on the mission field, or whether you are as the rest of us to whom Christ has called us to be his witnesses, what insights from diffusion research will help you communicate the Gospel of Christ Jesus more effectively to those for whom this is perceived as a new idea. Hints:
  - a. Regarding Relative Advantage:
    - 1) Read 1 John 4:8 and James 1:17. Does anything come to mind? (You can point out that because God's essence is love, and because he does not change [as many religions teach and many people believe], you don't have to worry that someday God will "have it in for you" and give you a bad day.)

- 2) Read Hebrews 9:27. Does anything come to mind? (Especially if you are witnessing to a Buddhist or someone else from a religion that believes in reincarnation?)
  - b. Regarding Compatibility:
    - 1) What comes to mind if you are witnessing to a nonbeliever who regards science? You can inform him or her that properly interpreted the Bible and careful scientific research are compatible: General Revelation points to, illustrates, and explains some aspects of Special Revelation (e.g., astrophysics and Romans 1:19-20) God does not contradict himself.
    - 2) What comes to mind? How about Deuteronomy 6:4? If you are witnessing to a Muslim, you say that you, too, believe in one God.
  - c. Regarding Observability: What comes to mind? How about modeling? Living a Christ-like life? Let them see Jesus in our lives. Paul: "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." (1 Corinthians 11:1)
  - d. Regarding Trailability: What comes to mind? How about inviting nonbelievers to church? "Try it; you'll like it!"
  - e. Regarding Complexity: Read or recite John 3:16 and Romans 10:9. What comes to mind? The basic message of the Bible, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is so simple that everyone can understand it and be blessed by it; it is not complex. At the same time, as people give more and more thought to the teaching of God's Word, everyone, including the most serious thinkers and scholars, can see the great profundity of God's Word; yet everyone can understand what he or she needs to know for salvation and for being in God's eternal service and presence with joy.
3. Once you successfully implement an innovation, what very important step should you next take? (Confirmation, Reinforcement) How will you do it with your innovation?

Previous versions of this essay have been published in *With an Eye on the Future: Development and Mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Duane H. Elmer and Lois McKinney (eds.), Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1996, pp. 223-229 and the international journal, *REC FOCUS*, Vol. 3, No. 3, September 2003, pp. 40-61. Updated October 3, 2006.