

TRANSITION TIMES

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JOINING: A NEW THING By Martin E. Lee

The New Year is a time to reflect on the past and make resolutions for the future. The type of ministry we were in 15, 10, or even 5 years ago may not be the same ministry we are in today. The person we were 15, 10, or even 5 years ago may not be the same person we are today. Hopefully, we all change as we learn.

Even though God is unchanging and eternal, He is a change agent in His creation: “Behold I am making all things new” Rev. 21:5. As part of God’s creation, having this change take place in our lives to shape and sanctify us is not easy. New things can be scary business. The neat thing is God simply says we are to **perceive it: “Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”** Isaiah 43:19. We don’t have to understand it. We don’t have to do it. We simply have to be “aware” of it, recognize it.

**“Behold, I am doing a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not
perceive it?”**

Isaiah 43:19, RSV

A big piece of the Intentional Interim Pastor’s (IIP’s) work is to encourage congregations to “perceive” the new things that God is doing in and through them. As part of God’s creation, “When organizations change, they are usually adapting to something that has happened to them rather than consciously deciding that such-and-such would be good to do” (Understanding Your Congregation as a System, Parson and Leas, 65). Leas describes, “Most students of organizational theory believe that insiders may not be able to see the contracts they have made with one another ...” (72). Knowing the organization’s insiders often cannot see their own behaviors, Leas recommends

someone from outside the organization come (like an IIP) to help assess what is going on.

During the IIM Joining Phase, the IIP spends much of his time listening and reflecting back. Sometimes old things can be seen in a new way. At the end of the IIM Joining Phase, I provide the congregation with a 1st Quarter Report. This report is a formal way to provide an outside perspective of the congregation’s patterns and behaviors. The 1st Quarter Report allows the congregation to see the contracts they have made with each other, how they behave with each other, and different patterns they have developed. I use the 1st Quarter Report as a spring board, or manual, for training the leaders and staff in preparation for a congregational self-study.

Another big piece of our work as IIP’s is to get out of the way. Sometimes the hardest part of our journey in faith is being patient and letting God do His “new things.” Sometimes getting out of the way means grieving the past, honoring the past, and then learning from the past. Learning new things happens when we “perceive it.”

Rev. Martin E. Lee has served as an IIM practitioner with a Finance Specialty for 10 years in the Michigan, Eastern and South Eastern Districts. He serves on the IMC board and as a NALIP trainer.

NEWS

Concordia Plan Services

Following its September 2018 meeting, the IMC Board authorized Rick Foss to be its liaison with Concordia Plan Services. The Board has been working with CPS to create a benefit class for credentialed intentional interim ministers to improve continuity of service and decrease paperwork. Rev Foss has told the Board to expect announcements soon from CPS about changes in coverage and paperwork for credentialed intentional interim pastors and those transitional practitioners working toward that status.



PRACTITIONERS TOOLBOX

PEOPLE SKILLS: BY ROBERT BOLTON

Book Report by Martin E. Lee

People skills are often deemed “soft” skills, but Bolton’s *People Skills* illustrates how concrete intentional human interactions can be. Bolton claims, “Our personality development and mental and physical health are linked to the caliber of our communication. One does not become fully human without interaction with other human beings.” Bolton believes humans mature through interactions with each other. In theological terms, “fully human” has been used to describe man in a right relationship with God and creation.

Bolton describes dozens of techniques to improve communication, designed particularly well for professionals. Three of those techniques are: using minimal encouragements, being aware of nonverbal communication, and avoiding vague generalities.

Regarding **minimal encouragements**, Bolton says the trick is to stay engaged while also staying out of the way. He observes, “these minimal encouragements are sprinkled throughout conversations” to help the other tell their story. Minimal encouragements are most useful in the early part of a conversation to get things going: for example, “tell me more,” “oh?” “for instance...,” “I see,” “really?” “go on,” or even, “mm-hmm” (40-48). This last minimal encouragement reminds me of how “the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans” Rom. 8:26.

During the IIM Joining Phase, members of the congregation are selected to form a Transition Task Force (TTF). Learning the minimal encouragements technique can help TTF leaders facilitate interactions with meeting attendees at cottage, focus group, and town-hall meetings.

Regarding **nonverbal communication**, Bolton observes, “The person – her facial expressions, posture, gestures, and other actions – provides an uninterrupted stream of information and a constant source of clues to the feelings she is experiencing.” Although there is much to read in body posture, Bolton suggests the face is where most of the nonverbal communication takes place. Verbal communication may tell the listener *what* a person is feeling, but nonverbals “often indicate how the person is coping with her feelings” (73).

Bolton advises practitioners, “**Be aware of your own feelings and bodily reactions**” (86). He tells of a family therapist who, when meeting with a troubled family, “the

therapist’s body develops its own discomfort.” He says that she will, “turn into those feelings and become more alert to what is happening in that family” (86). This reminds me of Jesus, when the Bible says He “has borne our grief and carried our sorrows” Isaiah 53:4.

The third technique is to avoid **vague generalities**. The goal of listening is to “facilitate the speaker’s efforts to arrive at his own best solution to the problem” (95). If the problem is discussed in **vague generalities**, it is difficult to solve. Also, “When the speaker becomes long-winded, he undermines the concreteness, the purposefulness, and the intensity of the interaction.” During Self-Study Phase cottage and town hall meetings, the TTF is encouraged to nominate a timekeeper to keep speakers on task.

Human interactions take place within organizations. Bolton claims, “The way an organization is structured has a bearing on the amount of conflict generated in it.” Bolton cites Eugene Litwak, who claims that “the potential for conflict tends to be greater in centralized, bureaucratic organizations,” and, “the more rigid institutions have less effective communication and are less adept at managing conflict constructively than are the organizations at the other end of the continuum” (212-13). These observations are helpful when considering typical congregational models: organizational charts, or church council governance models versus policy governance models. An IIP should be careful not to assume individuals within a church organization structure are the source of the conflict without considering the role of the structure itself, or how effectively the structure is being utilized. From a theological perspective, we understand that much of conflict has to do with the condition of fallen creation as a whole, the structure.

To address organizational conflicts, Bolton recommends, “Well-conceived and clearly stated policies and procedures which have the understanding and support of the relevant persons create orderly processes which can help mitigate unnecessary chaos and conflict” (213).

NEWS

IMC Updates

Ron Moritz resigned as a member of the Interim Ministry Conference Board. Peter Alexander agreed to serve the remaining year of his term.

Bob Fickenscher asked not to be elected as Chairman. The IMC board elected Fred Poepel to hold that office.