

*“A chicken in every pot.” – FDR*

*“Five engines in every garage.”– Honda Motors*

*“A Redemptive Learning Community in every church.” – IgniteUS*

Ok, I know what a chicken is. I know what a Honda is. So, what is a Redemptive Learning Community? According to Peter Senge, a “learning organization” is an organization that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future. For such an organization, it is not enough merely to survive. “Survival learning,” or what is often termed “adaptive learning,” is important — indeed it is necessary. But for a learning organization, “adaptive learning” must be joined by “generative learning,” learning that enhances our capacity to create.<sup>1</sup> The church, Christianity as a faith system, is flourishing on every inhabited continent except North America. Consider the following data for statistical confirmation of this premise.<sup>2</sup>

- Only 3 % of the churches in America (360,000), are growing by conversion growth. That is, people being redeemed, baptized, and becoming growing and maturing disciples in that local church.
- Around the globe, Christianity is the fastest growing religion. There are approximately 3,500 new churches per week. In America, we close 50 churches per week.
- 47% of people are highly resistant to change. 17 % are devoted to peace and don't make any waves; they always side with those who oppose change. Therefore, we face a 64% opposition force in almost every church attempting to introduce change.
- The average pastoral tenure is about 4.3 years. The most effective ministry occurs between years 5.4 and 14.3 of pastoral tenure.
- Less than 1 in 10 regular attenders of Christian Churches give 10% or more of their income to the LORD through the church.
- People say they believe in Truth. Yet, 2 out of 3 adults and 4 out of 5 teenagers say that Truth is relative and there is no absolute Truth.
- Fully one half of the people who attend a Christian Church on any given weekend are not Christian; that is, they do not trust in Christ alone for their eternal salvation.
- The number of “regular attenders” in local churches that are absent on any given Sunday continues to grow. 10 years ago it was 2 in 10. It is now 3 in 10, soon to be 4 in 10. This means that if you have 500 “regular attenders,” on any given Sunday you will have 30-40% of them absent.
- There is a famine of the hearing of the Words of the LORD (Amos 8:11). People say they believe in the Scriptures as the Word of God. But too often when their shepherd seeks to apply the Bible to daily living and conduct, he is castigated, rebuffed, or worse, fired.

---

<sup>1</sup> Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, p. 14. Published in 1990, it provides an abundance of much needed guidance for a pastor in today's rapid change culture.

<sup>2</sup> The majority of these data points may be substantiated by examining the research done by George Barna, Barna Research Group and have been published in his bi-weekly updates on [www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org). The statement regarding the famine of the hearing of the words of the LORD is intended to indicate causality and is the author's.



The church did not suddenly arrive at this dismal juncture. She will not be suddenly extricated. History seems to demonstrate God's remarkable longsuffering with recalcitrant pilgrims. But there is a limit. Contemporary literature points to a possible terminus of God's "waiting" on America.<sup>3</sup> The church in America has the greatest fiscal, educational and human resources of any nation on earth. Why then, are these unmistakable signs of declension and impotence so pervasive? Very simply, **the church needs to repent of her sin**. She has turned in on herself. She is heavily invested in self-preservation. She has lost sight of her God mandated mission – to make disciples. The church is to be salt and light so that people are redeemed, equipped, transformed, and most significantly, the church should model this behavior so that it is repeated over and over. The model is missing. Where do we go from here?

The task is daunting. The number of "noble servants" who have "died" on the hill of change is legion. The pastor seeking a valuable treatise on this process should consult *Leading Turnaround Churches*.<sup>4</sup> So, how do you turn around a church? IgniteUS has developed a ministry model to address this challenging mandate.

**Change is a process, not an event.** The church is a sub-culture, and to change a culture requires the modification of values prior to any significant modification of organizational structures. If this priority is not honored, the result will be what some identify as insurrection, rebellion, riots and other aggressive and fatal activities.

Philosophers teach us that "we come out where we go in." By this, they mean that the presuppositions with which we enter a dialogue or debate influence, shape and ultimately determine the outcomes or conclusions we reach.

The process necessary for institutional change in the IgniteUS model includes the establishment of a Redemptive Learning Community. This requires a foundation. Jesus spoke of building the house on a rock. Rest assured, when you attempt this, storms will come. So pay close attention to the elements of foundation-building and systematically, with diligence, include them in establishing a Redemptive Learning Community with the members of the flock you shepherd. The need is apparent to even the most casual observer. Let's turn our attention to finding a remedy.

## I. Foundation for a Redemptive Learning Community in the Local Church

- A. **High View of God** — The historic evangelical conviction that God is. He is Omniscient, Omnipotent, Holy and Sovereign. Man makes plans, but God directs his steps. We know about this God through His revelation of Himself, the Scriptures. The Bible is God's Word, true in every part, and is a reliable for faith and life.
- B. **Repentance** — Turn around, cease the present behavior and change. That is the specific action required in turning from sin. This is what each local church that is not thriving needs to engage in.

The issue is not merely bad structure, lack of excellence, or loss of vision. The issue is that **failure to fulfill the Great Commandment and the Great Commission is sin**. Consider the meaning as applied in this context.

The most accurate word in Western culture to describe what happens in a learning organization is one that hasn't had much currency for the past several hundred years. It is a word we have used in our work with organizations for years, but we always caution them, and ourselves, to use it sparingly in public. The word is *metanoia*, and it means "a shift of mind." The word has a rich history. For the Greeks, it meant a fundamental shift or change, or more literally *transcendence* ("meta" – above or beyond, as in "metaphysics") of mind ("noia," from the root "nous" – of mind). In the early (Gnostic) Christian tradition, it took on a special meaning of awakening shared intuition and

---

<sup>3</sup> *The Future of Christianity* by Alister E. McGrath., 2002. This book is part of the Blackwell Manifestos, designed to stimulate discussion on important issues. Also *The Next Christendom - The Coming of Global Christianity* by Philip Jenkins, 2002. The thesis of this work is that the epicenter of Christianity is shifting from Europe and N. America to Africa and South America. The tables in this book offer mathematical projections on populations, numbers of adherents in various faith systems, etc. that seem to validate the premise articulated.

<sup>4</sup> *Leading Turnaround Churches* by Gene Wood, 2001. This book is available only through Church Smart Resources. Call 1-800-253-4276 to order. Gene pastors Grace Baptist in Glendora, CA.

direct knowing of the highest, of God. Metanoia was probably the key term of such early Christians as John the Baptist. In the Catholic corpus the word metanoia was eventually translated as “repent.”

To grasp the meaning of metanoia is to grasp the deeper meaning of learning, for **learning also involves a fundamental shift or movement of mind**. The problem with talking about “learning organizations” is that the “learning” has lost its central meaning in contemporary usage. Most people’s eyes glaze over if you talk to them about “learning” or “learning organizations.” This is not surprising, because in everyday use, learning has come to be synonymous with taking in information: “Yes, I learned all about that in class yesterday.” Yet, taking in information is only distantly related to real learning. It would be nonsensical to say, “I just read a great book about bicycle riding. I’ve now learned that.”

Real learning gets to the heart of what it means to be human. Through learning we re-create ourselves. Through learning we become able to do something we never were able to do. Through learning we re-perceive the world and our relationship to it. Through learning we extend our capacity to create, to be part of the generative process of life<sup>5</sup>.

- C. **Wholeheartedness** — This quality enabled Caleb to endure 40 years of wilderness wanderings and five years of waiting until he got his mountain (Josh. 14:6-14). Asa exhibited this quality, and God brought a significant spiritual renewal under his leadership. Jesus hates anything less than wholeheartedness. In fact, he specifically says He will vomit it out (Rev. 3:14-17). Kingdom vision and values must be embraced wholeheartedly.
- D. **Calling** — Leading the renewal and change process in a local church is not for the faint hearted or the casual participant. The Pastor is God's change agent in each church. The leadership profile is always plural, involving multiple leaders in each local assembly. The process requires a leader with a desire for and commitment to long tenure. Change demands trust. Trust is earned over time. Plan to invest a minimum of four to seven years to realize the momentum of new structures implemented through the change process.
- E. **Vision** — A clear mental image of a preferable future, given by God to His chosen servants; it is based on a clear understanding of God, self and circumstance.<sup>6</sup> This is the responsibility of the Pastor but must be embraced by other key leaders and the body at large over time.
- F. **Prayer** — If you don't pray passionately, persistently and humbly, don't even think about this.

## II. Characteristics of a Redemptive Learning Community in YOUR Local Church

- A. **Objective Assessment** — Measurement instruments are applied to a variety of issues. Members of the body participate at a variety of levels. The faithful application of this process provides a clear picture of reality.<sup>7</sup>
- B. **Learning Covenant** — Each participant creates a learning covenant for himself. This includes a reading schedule, learning objectives and specific application steps for ministry in their assembly. The development of these covenants is a team project so the collective result benefits the mission and vision of the church as well as each individual participant from that assembly. Each participant begins to experience incredible joy as they become intentional and effective in their service to the LORD.
- C. **Knowledge** — One size does not fit all. There are no packaged processes to take home, add water and stir. The structures of the past will not lead to the Promised Land. Understanding the times, culture, people, and ministry context are all necessary endeavors inherent in this journey (1 Chron. 12:32).<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*. pp. 13&14.

<sup>6</sup> Barna, *The Power of Vision*, Chapter 2, 1992. pp. 28-36.

<sup>7</sup> Jim Collins, *Good To Great*, 2001, pp. 83-87. The Stockdale Paradox. Retain faith that you will prevail in the end, regardless of the difficulties. AND at the same time - Confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be. Objective Assessment minimizes denial and opens the real issues to scrutiny and correction.

- D. **Coaching** — Each assembly has a coach that provides equipping and encouragement that are suited to the culture and context of that ministry. The result is a life-on-life relationship that strengthens the professional counsel and direction in ministry. The relationship provides accountability for tasks and encouragement that results in stamina for the long haul.
- E. **Applied Theology** — Measure ministry by transformation, not mere activity. The translation of ministry skills into fruitful structures that transform people is the goal and design of a Redemptive Learning Community through IgniteUS. Paul wrote of zeal according to knowledge. Applied Theology is truth incarnate, knowledgeable people utilizing spiritual maturity to grow others in the fullness of the Image of Christ.
- G. **Modeling** — Jesus said the student should be like his teacher and the servant like his master (Matt. 10:25). Paul said, “Therefore I urge you to imitate me” (1 Cor. 4:16). Leaders must have a model to imitate, and they must themselves serve as models
- H. **Communication 360°** — One of the elemental causes of institutionalism in the church is the passionate resistance on the part of leaders to hear and act upon the issue of deficiency in their ministry. Open and principled communication on a regular and systematic basis permits frequent correction. When applied with a pure heart and sound theological principles, this dynamic equips the body of a local church to achieve and maintain healthy, effective structures and ministry initiatives.

### III. Results of the Process

The following data serves as beneficial criteria in answering the question “Did the IgniteUS Leadership Development Process and Redemptive Learning Community accomplish transformation in the local church?”

- A. The church has a clear and compelling Mission & Purpose statement that is owned and actively embraced by 80%+ of the congregation.
- B. The church has a clear and functional Philosophy of Ministry that provides guidelines and direction for ministry.
- C. The church selects Leaders on the basis of character, competence, and a Biblical profile for leadership developed through the IgniteUS process.
- D. The church has a discernable expression of unity and oneness that provides an atmosphere for thriving outreach, assimilation, and disciple-making.
- E. The Pastor and Leaders have examined the various dimensions of the church’s history, understand the implications of each major issue, and have satisfactorily resolved any dysfunctional patterns from the past.
- F. The church has a Leadership Development process that produces Leaders for the future. A major component of their growth is modeled behavior by existing Leaders. This includes ongoing learning and coaching designed to ensure competence and excellence in ministry. The church is a Learning Community.
- G. The church has developed and implemented a ministry-focused, Biblically based structure. This includes Ministry Teams and a decentralized approach to ministry. Ministry decisions are made at the level closest to the actual execution of ministry.

---

<sup>8</sup> Alister McGrath, *The Future of Christianity*, 2002. pp. 140-144. McGrath is addressing what he refers to as Academic Theology, dominated for centuries by Western thought. This dominance is rapidly diminishing. He quotes David Wells who writes convincingly about the contextualization of theology for our own time.

- H. The church has an operative Biblical model of and process for Church Discipline.
- I. The church has a membership profile and process that is based on Biblical criteria: worship, evangelism, service, financial contribution and small group participation.
- J. The Pastor and the Leadership Team have developed and refined a Biblical theology that is the foundation and basis for ministry. This is systematically taught to the congregation.
- K. The church has established phased spiritual growth definitions. There is an accountability process that produces objective measurable progress toward obeying all that Jesus commanded. The exercise of accountability produces both maturity and joy among the body.
- L. The church has developed and utilizes objective feedback processes in a 360° fashion. The Leaders hear from the people, and the people hear from the Leaders.
- M. The church has an intentional strategy to fulfill the Great Commission. This includes a church planting strategy for use on a local level.
- N. The church rejoices that they have accepted the discipline necessary to engage the Leadership Development process and actively seeks to enlist other churches to follow their example.

#### IV. Action Steps

Ok, I know what a chicken is. I know what a Honda is. Now, I also have a fundamental grasp of what a Redemptive Learning Community is. So what do I do now?

- A. **Pray** — If you seek Him, He will be found. “But in their distress they turned to the LORD, the God of Israel, and sought Him, and He was found by them” (2 Chron. 15:4). Ask, seek, knock (Matt. 7:7-8).
- B. **Review** — Examine your heart, the people you shepherd, the ministry trends inherent in your pastoral setting. Be brutally honest: What do you see, really?
- C. **Journal** — Put in writing the issues and implications of your current ministry principles and practices. Where will you be in 3, 5 or 10 years if you continue the status quo? In a half page or less, describe the consequences of doing nothing.
- D. **Act** — The paralysis of analysis. Don't stop with merely identifying issues; change the causal factors producing them. Engage reality. Contact us. We will assist you in becoming the Leader you need to be so that your ministry is effective and Christ honoring.