

Coach's Corner

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“Leading Through Change”

One of the prayer requests I have had in my prayer journal since I accepted the call to come to Minden is this: “God, give grace to all of us in the MEFC congregation to have a Philippians 2:14 (“Do everything without complaining or arguing” [NIV]) attitude when it comes to change. I regularly pray this because I know how easily change can cause hard feelings in us. I also know that however much we strive to keep changes to a minimum, change is part of life—especially within the body of Christ.

This begs the question, “What is the best way to lead a congregation through change?” Back in the early to mid-nineties, I thought through this issue a great deal because it was at the heart of my doctoral program. The program, in essence, focused upon gaining a doctoral level theological education, but also taking one’s theology and bringing it to bear upon a congregation. At the heart of this program was leading people through change based upon biblical foundations.

With all the time, study, and money that went into that program, I found out some pretty simple truths. First, a good approach to change is not complicated, but it is not always easy. Second, I learned that there are three important steps to a good change process within a church. Let me briefly outline these for you. I call them the three T’s of change.

Train is the first step. If a congregation faces what may be a very difficult decision or needed change, one of the biggest reasons that the process may end in conflict and division is if we do not take the time to teach and train regarding the area of needed change. Why must this be the first step? Consider:

- Scripture is to guide us. If we don’t delve into what the Bible has to say about the issue, we run the risk of getting off-track. If, as a body, we are studying the Scripture together, we also may gain more wisdom in how to apply it. (Cf. Dt. 12:32-13:4; Prov. 3:5-6; 2 Tim. 2:15; 3:16-17; 1 Peter 2:4-10)
- Among Christians, if they do not understand how a suggested change from leadership fits with the biblical teaching, the perception may be that the suggestions are unbiblical. This can lead to very strong feelings and divisions.
- Such teaching and training can help bring people onto the same page. They can begin to value and think about the same concepts and then become excited about the possible changes and new direction.

- The Bible is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Ps. 119:105 Searching its pages before working through change, can give us wise and strong practical guidance for how to move forward.

Talking, or in other words, discussion and planning, then becomes the all-important second step in the change process. At this point, what we undertake is a strong discussion among a planning committee, a board, or the entire congregation (depending upon the issue-at-hand) to work out how we will proceed based upon the biblical direction we have already discussed. We do this because:

- “In an abundance of counselors there is safety.” Prov. 11:14
- “We are all “priests” and ministers in the body of Christ, those who have been gifted and called to serve our Lord in some capacity; as well as indwelt with the Holy Spirit. As such, bringing together different people to help discuss, apply, brainstorm, and plan is usually a good process. Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4:12-16; 1 Peter 2:4-10
- This step in the process also tends to foster ownership among the congregation.
- As people meet together and plan, some of the most important talking which must take place is talking to God about the change—in other words, bathing it in prayer.

Taking it to the street, or implementation, becomes the third and final step to bring about change. Believe it or not, this is one of the places in the change process where a good deal of change comes to a halt. Countless times I have seen committees or boards agree on biblical principles, do a pretty good job of brainstorming and deciding what ought to be done, but then allow all the work to fall to the ground without ever putting it in action. This is why coming up with a clear plan as to what needs to be done, the steps involved, when each task needs to be completed and followed up on, how much it will cost, and who is responsible for each task is vital.

I am sure that you could probably find a better guide for leading through change, but this one works pretty well when it is followed. Those last four words are important. I don't always follow it. That is why I wanted to write on this subject in this *Coach's Corner* and it is also why I have included a simple tool to walk us through the change process. I pray that we can encourage, support, and remind each other to follow a healthy biblical approach to change—the three T's of change.

Joyfully leading the congregation through change with you,

Tom