

# WAITING FOR GOD'S NEW THING:

SPIRITUAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN THE IN-BETWEEN TIME

— or —

WHY BETTER ISN'T GOOD ENOUGH

## THE OUTCOME CONVERSATION CONTINUES:

The TMF metrics project that produced the book *Doing the Math of Mission* very importantly identified the issue that **metrics is a difficult task because the church is clear about its aspirations, but not about its outcomes.** We are unclear about the actual difference that we believe God has called us to make in the next steps of our ministry. In six months since the publication of the book, doing work with groups to learn to develop outcomes, a second truth has formed. **When set to the task of identifying outcomes, leaders uniformly turned to the work of improving the church that they already knew.** No one set an outcome for ministry in the mission field that would require a form of church that does not yet exist. And yet, it is this mission field of folks, who do not respond to current church forms and practices, that is growing around us. It is this realization that prompts the argument to be found in the following paper.

by Gil Rendle

TMF, SENIOR VICE-PRESIDENT

## THE ARGUMENT BEGINS:

The familiar text that undergirds the following argument is from Isaiah:

*Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old.*

*I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, Do you not perceive it?*

— (43:18-19 NRSV)

Even familiar texts can speak to us anew. In this case it is the question at the end – “Do you not perceive it?” This is a text meant for this moment. The world for the last several decades has been filled with pronouncements: digital revolutions, global communities, paperless offices, compressed time and distance; generational and economic divides, and the list goes on at length. The pronouncements are quite correct and are all about what once was and is no more. Life is developing differently.

However, for the most part, many of us are still getting up in the morning and things seem pretty much the same. We may be reading the daily news on our iPad instead of the local newspaper. The 10 am meeting may be on a conference call instead of in the conference room. But is that really what was meant by the digital age? Sunday worship now has a praise band, lasts 40 minutes, and starts at 9:15 am. But it is still Sunday morning, and people are still driving to church. Is that really all that is meant by doing ministry in a new mission field? Ours is an eternal, all powerful, God with the capacity to create whole worlds in mere days. Yet the deepest cultural changes seem to come in very modest daily doses. It is a conundrum.

Despite the modest daily differences, the projections of seismic shifts that will impact the United Methodist denomination constantly lurk in the shadows. Let’s not rehearse these at length here because they are familiar. As a quick reminder:

- Our United Methodist denomination is increasingly unsustainable, living off more and more money given by fewer and fewer people who are getting older and older.
- We are projected to close more than 10,000 churches in the next several decades.
- We have fewer large churches because they are becoming mid-sized; fewer mid-sized churches because they are becoming small; and we have fewer small churches able to support the salary and benefit packages of full-time clergy.
- Driven by generational patterns that are both constant and accelerating, people are increasingly not drawn to organized religion and do not resonate with congregational forms.

Let us be clear. None of these trends are self-correcting. “Turn-around” solutions will not abate the change, even if we are able to slow it down. The modest daily declines of these trends add up to the paradigmatic shift we must face into.

God is indeed doing a new thing. But it is difficult to perceive. **This paper will argue that it is in this paradox of deep change but daily sameness that we need leadership that can thrive.**

We want our bishops and district superintendents to be missional strategists. We want our clergy and lay leaders to change people (make disciples) and move out into the mission field. We want our efforts to lead us to new people and new ways, even when we go about our work with a daily sameness.





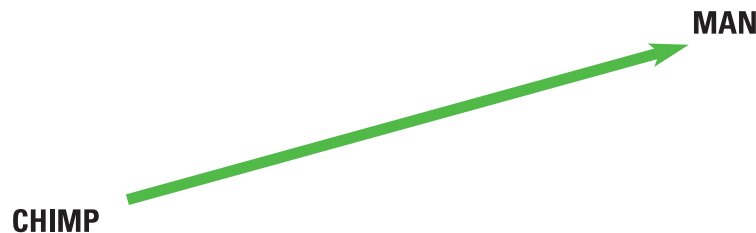
**The argument here is that to live in this very rich paradox of an in-between time, marked by both change and sameness, we will need to come to terms with three challenges within ourselves:**

1. How we understand change
2. The difference between improving and creating – and the need to do both simultaneously
3. The need to think and act in two different directions

## **CHALLENGE #1: UNDERSTANDING CHANGE: “I AM ABOUT TO DO A NEW THING; NOW IT SPRINGS FORTH.”**

We live with different and competing assumptions about how change happens. In fact, change does unfold differently depending upon the cultural context of events. Michael Fullan points out that “... the more complex society becomes, the more sophisticated leadership must become. Complexity means change, but specifically it means rapidly occurring, unpredictable, nonlinear change.”<sup>1</sup> Fullan doesn’t talk about leading change, but rather leading in a culture of change. Unlike many of us who were trained for leadership at an earlier time, he is clear that change is not something that can be controlled or managed. We do not control the context in which we lead. We control our actions within that context. So, rather than lead change, leaders need to learn to lead while change is happening. It is a shift in assumptions. It matters how leaders understand change since our assumptions will direct our behavior.

Alpesh Bhatt, in his marvelous little book, draws the distinction between “gradual progression” in change (a linear form) and “punctuated equilibrium,”<sup>2</sup> (a discontinuous form). For example, he points out that most people think of evolution as a process that is a gradual progression over a long period of time through which an early species of ape was formed into modern man. If thought of as a



linear, gradual progression, evolution might look like the following:

However, evolution (like human development, technological shifts, and many forms of non-linear change) is not progressive but is a series of “punctuated equilibriums.” We experience long periods of virtual standstill punctuated by swift introductions of new change. The new change forms a new



equilibrium that feels like its own virtual standstill, only to be, itself, punctuated by new forms that eventually come along later. We call these moments of great change a “paradigm shift” when even our most basic assumptions are challenged and must be changed. Unlike gradual progression, the assumption of punctuated equilibrium in human evolution might look more like the following:



One plateau of steady sameness in which a species can acclimate and thrive is progressively interrupted (punctuated) with change deep enough to privilege another different and newly developed species. Every stage of steady state, when punctuated, becomes the ecology in which the new change thrives and in which the old ways die away or are subverted.

There are a number of implications in understanding change as punctuated equilibrium. Consider:

- There is actually a lot of change going on in the long periods of virtual standstill. However, the purpose of change, in times of standstill, is to constantly reestablish a balanced state. Bhatt likens this change to “the Red Queen effect,” where in *Alice in Wonderland*, one would run simply to stay in place (working harder, or in new ways, to achieve the same results.) As we will discover later, the hard work of running in place to escape moving backwards can quite easily be mistaken as making progress. Picking low-hanging fruit is actually quite different from harvesting change.
- That in those rare episodes of very fast punctuated change, species die off, incapable of surviving in the new ecosystem. Not all will make it into, or thrive in, the next ecology.
- During periods of punctuation, what once worked in the past is **actually a threat**. As Bhatt put it, “everything you know for certain is a source of massive risk because what you know is relative to a reality that no longer exists.”

The birthing of a new paradigm is a disruptive moment. As Isaiah wrote: “*now it springs forth.*”

However, the introduction of a new paradigm is not a simple stepping out of the old into the new. More than 50 years ago, as historians of science were watching dramatic shifts in the paradigms of science (from mechanical to quantum physics, for example), Thomas Kuhn made the critical observation that when the new paradigm is birthed, the old does not go away.<sup>iii</sup> The discovery of quantum physics did not invalidate the observations of mechanical physics. The laws of energy still applied because they were explaining the mechanical world. Quantum physics was, in fact, explaining a different kind of world, beyond mechanics. So when paradigms shift, both paradigms continue on, at least for a period of time. Going back to human evolution, the graphic might more accurately look like the following, in which each preceding species co-exists with the new form as it is being birthed.



The stages in the development of the human species were not discrete. Evidence suggests that, at least for overlapping periods of time, multiple human species existed in a shared ecology. New ways and old ways do, for a period of time, coexist.

## THE DILEMMA OF THE MAINLINE CHURCH

Applying the construct of change, as punctuated equilibrium, to the current experience of the mainline church offers a new way to describe our current situation and the challenge to the mission strategist and mission field expectations we have of our leaders.

Consider the shift in the cultural attractiveness of congregations (as a form of organized religion). It is not news that people are increasingly reporting being spiritual, but not religious. People continue to seek meaning that can be found in the life of the Spirit. They increasingly, however, do not do their seeking in congregations and denominations. The growth in the percentage of individuals reporting to be unaffiliated with any religion has gone through a progressive shift across the most recent generational cohorts:<sup>iv</sup>

GENERATIONAL COHORT	% OF "UNAFFILIATED"
Silents (before 1946)	9%
Baby Boomers (1946 – 1964)	15%
Gen X (1965 – 1980)	21%
Millenials (after 1980)	33%

Again, this is a trend that is both progressive and dramatic. The progression and strength of the trend is sufficient to argue that we are not experiencing a temporary cultural preference that will self-correct to once again favor congregations and denominations in ways we currently know. One can argue that there are now at least two coexisting “species” of followers of the Spirit. For our purpose, they may be described as follows:

- **The Affiliated:** Those with a communal allegiance to Christ\* who are highly middle class in lifestyle, values or economics and who appreciate membership and institutions. (These are the people most known to the mainline church and with whom denominations are more comfortable and competent.)
- **The Unaffiliated:** Those with a communal allegiance to Christ,\* but who are other than middle class in lifestyle, values or economics and avoid membership in favor of participation and avoid institutions in favor of communities and movements. (These are the people most unknown to the mainline church and with whom denominations are less comfortable and competent.)

\* “Communal allegiance to Christ” was a helpful phrase, offered by Bishop Scott Jones in a conversation with the SCJ Conclave of active bishops, in an effort to escape the confusion of the word “congregation” which now has a growing assortment of meanings in the changing landscape. “Communal allegiance” honors the way in which people form community relationships in their search for meaning, whether or not the community reflects the most common form of congregations.



Punctuated equilibrium invites us to look at this cultural development as a moment in which leaders are challenged to do “both/and,” that is, to work effectively with both the affiliated and the unaffiliated. Much has been written about post-modernism, post-Christendom, and post-denominationalism as if they are completed shifts. Using linear models of change one is either modern or postmodern, one lives either in Christendom and denominationalism or in post-Christendom and post-denominationalism. Non-linear, punctuated equilibrium brings us much closer to our reality of both/and. The more realistic description of the present moment might be pictured as follows, as the two “species” of followers live in a world that is both modern and postmodern, both denominational and post-denominational.

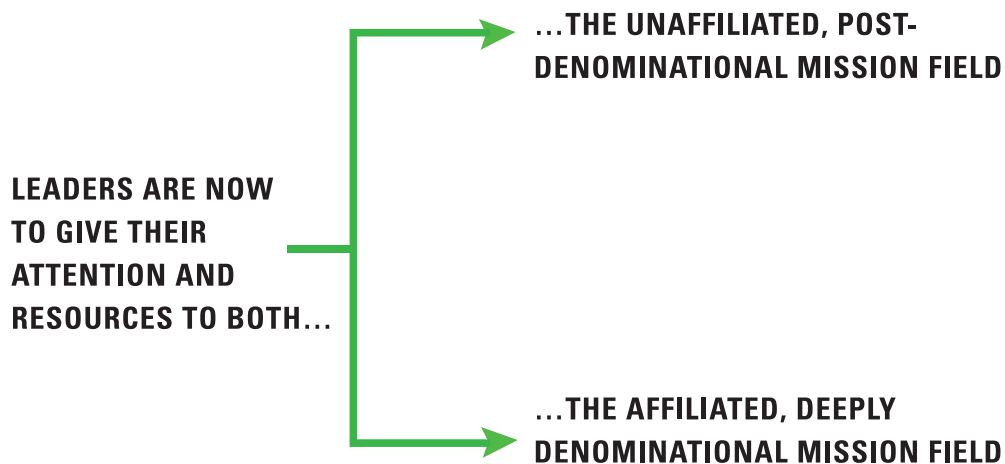


Because we are in a punctuated equilibrium where what is familiar is dually experienced with the new, the current reality is that the mainline church is now tasked with ministry in two quite different ecologies, at the same time. One is the known work of congregational life. The other is in a more foreign and unfamiliar mission field beyond the natural draw of the established congregation. The paradox is that leaders are expected to make disciples in both ecologies, even though one “species” (the affiliated) does not relate with ease and comfort with the other “species” (the unaffiliated), and vice-versa. In the midst of a church conflict about worship, one very long-tenured member of a congregation once said, “I don’t understand all the fuss about music. Why can’t we just sing one of the twenty or so approved hymns of the church and be happy?” When one lives so deeply in an old and familiar ecology of congregational life, imagine how unnerving it is to be confronted by people in the new land who explore their faith in bars and community centers and whose generosity in response to Christ may be measured more in time given to serve others than in money given to support an institution.

## **CHALLENGE #2: THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN IMPROVING AND CREATING – AND THE NEED TO DO BOTH SIMULTANEOUSLY**

Let’s change our graphic model a bit for this next part of the argument. The paradoxical task for our leaders in this new time is to work simultaneously on two levels (and with two “species” of followers) at a punctuated moment.





While the challenge is for leaders to address both of these different ecologies simultaneously, the paradox is that a different form of work is required for each.

## **IMPROVEMENT VS. CHANGE**

In the “land of the affiliated,” the work of making disciples is a **work of improvement** – seeking to make the current denominational and congregational systems more effective at doing what they already know how to do. Improvement, by definition, implies taking something known and making it better. In the “land of the unaffiliated,” to make disciples leaders must address the **work of creation**. Because it is unknown, and because it is not based on *what is*, leaders must work to create something *that is not yet*.

Perhaps a bit of a side-bar is necessary at this point to acknowledge that a number of experiments in new forms of faith communities that are examples of new creation are actually reaching back to old, even ancient, forms to find their new way. The new urban monastic communities, the bubbling up of house church – bible studies, the informal mission movements, are new expressions shaped by basically unaffiliated folk drawing from old and historic models. A considerable part of the effort of the unaffiliated folk who have an allegiance to Christ is to recover the purpose of the church, even while seeking to escape the structure of the church. For the purpose of this paper, however, I will argue that these are efforts of creating something new, even if with ancient roots.

So let’s return to the argument that in a punctuated equilibrium, the old and the new co-exist. The double burden of the leaders of the established denominational church is simultaneously:

- To **improve** the congregational form of organized religion because there remain those who are drawn to congregations as a means to follow Christ. Add to this fact, the reality that the current form of congregations is unsustainable as a denominational system. Improvement is clearly needed to survive in this new world.
- To **create** new forms of faith communities that will better self-organize and will seek a deep theological and spiritual connection with Wesleyan Methodism while wanting (or accepting) only a long and loose tether to the institutional rules of that tradition. Creation is clearly needed in order to thrive in this new world.



The double burden of leadership is just that – twice as difficult as just managing an institution that is holding its own in a stable environment. In fact, working both on improving and creating calls for two different orders of work, two different ways of working. We will pick that up in Challenge #3.

For the moment, however, we need to explore the double burden of leadership that is new to this in-between time of both/and. Double burdens are commonly fraught with dilemmas, and there are five that would be helpful to acknowledge as we face our future.

## **DILEMMA #1 – WE COMMONLY WORK ON IMPROVEMENT, BUT IDENTIFY IT AS CREATION.**

As I work with annual conferences and their leaders, let me confess that what I most frequently see is improvement, while what many leaders describe to me are efforts at creation. For example, most of the new church starts that I see are not new creations. Yes, of course, they result in new congregations. But, most frequently they are another iteration of, or an improvement of earlier efforts of, a process of doing something that we already know how to do. We develop new strategies and engage new partners, such as parenting congregations to share the effort of new church starts. Yet the result is a congregation, much like the more vital ones that we already have, most frequently in communities most like the communities we are already most effective in, engaging more people (the affiliated) most like the ones we are already most comfortable and competent with. We then charter these congregations when they grow to an organizational size sufficient to meet the economic and disciplinary standards most comfortable with our current denominational way of being.

We deeply need these new congregations. Let us be careful to neither diminish the need, nor the hard work required, to produce these new church starts. Even among the “species” of the affiliated, a new congregation, without pre-established norms and traditions from earlier generations, is more attractive and engaging. However, for the sake of this paper, I suggest that these new congregations are an example of us doing what we know how to do. They are improvements, not creations.

Likewise, consider our emphasis on recruiting, credentialing, and appointing a younger generation of clergy. The attention that this issue of clergy leadership receives is more than appropriate, given the median age of our clergy in place. Again, however, this is work we know how to do. We know how to call young people to ministry, to train and prepare them, to ordain and deploy them. We have to put our hand to this task in a new way because previous streams of young leaders have dried up while, at the same time, shifting cultural values make this life choice of ordained ministry less obvious to our young. But we know how to do this, and are currently redoubling our efforts in this work. Annual conferences now pay close attention to their increases in the percentage of clergy under 35 years old. However, when these young clergy are deployed to replace retiring clergy in the established congregations already in the mission field doing ministry with the affiliated, I again argue that this is improvement, not creation.

Naming such hard won accomplishments as new congregations and a new generation of clergy as improvements rather than creation feels harsh (as in “mere” improvements), given the attention and resources it has required. Before moving on, let me offer a word in favor of these improvements that





may be thought of as low-hanging fruit. When we know, or can learn, how to do something to increase our capacity to offer Christ to others it is, in fact, a requirement of faithfulness that we do so. This low-hanging fruit of doing what we know how to do is difficult enough work on its own. Such work should not be taken lightly or dismissed as less-than other forms of work.

A singular undergirding reality of the work of improving is that, without it, our United Methodist denomination will not have the capacity to live at all in the new cultural landscape. We are already unsustainable in age and resources. We need every improvement that we can muster to extend our sustainability. An extended sustainability will be the base from which we will offer Christ to the still thriving “species” of the affiliated as they continue to be with us. We do, however, need to acknowledge that extending our sustainability is a far different task from delaying our demise, let alone creating a new future. In order to learn how to live in the new ecology, leaders will need to be able to distinguish *managing demise*, from *improving current practice*, from *creating inroads to a new culture*. Leaders will need to be increasingly clear about the task at which they work.

The current point is that the work of improvement is not the work of creation. We cannot confuse the two. And it does not help to do improvement and talk of it as creation. Consider the difference:

Improving and creating are two distinct tasks. Both are critically needed. However, to improve, but to think of it as creating something new, will only allow us to practice self-deception about our efforts to bring Wesleyan Methodism to a changed world. Thinking of improvement as creation hides the even harder work from ourselves and allows us to settle for the known.



**DILEMMA #2 – YOU CAN’T DO BOTH FORMS OF WORK UNDER THE SAME RULES.**

LOW-HANGING IMPROVEMENTS	CREATIONS OF NEW FORMS
New church starts in familiar demographics for those who easily affiliate	New faith communities, in unfamiliar places with unfamiliar people, which resonate with those who choose not to affiliate with organized religion
Young clergy to replace retirees and to serve our current congregations	Young clergy to start and lead non-congregational forms of faith communities
Increasing attendance in our most vital congregations which are already effective in their present ecology	New experiments of missional communities that will exist outside of congregational forms
Yoking and clustering the smallest congregations into units with the economic capacity to support full time clergy	Clergy and leadership compensation models that are not dependent on congregational giving or denominational subsidy
Hispanic ministry with a goal of creating congregations that mirror congregations of a dominant Anglo denominational culture	Indigenous faith communities that spring up from the local community and mirror Wesleyan theology but not congregational forms
Alternative worship services to meet the expanding preferences of those who affiliate with congregations	Worship practices that reflect the character of those participating rather than the traditions of those who have gone before

Denominational polity is an ecclesial agreement, built over time, that instructs followers who they are called to be and how to do what they are called to do. It serves as a tool of instruction, alignment and agreement. Polity forms over time. From the simple *Large Minutes* of the earliest American Methodist conferences to the complex and lengthy *Books of Discipline and Resolutions*, denominational polity is both the product of, and a tool for, linear and continuous change in the denomination. As such, it serves us well in times of gradual progression and in the work of improvement. As Bhatt framed the issue, continual reworking of denominational polity is an appropriate strategy for “periods of virtual standstill” because, following the Red Queen effect, it is change intended to constantly re-establish a balanced state within an institutional denomination.

At the same time, a steady, stable agreement of denominational identity and practice does not serve us equally well in times of “punctuated equilibrium.” When the change in the mission field is abrupt enough, and of a magnitude that challenges the very assumptions of the denominational paradigm, polity is experienced as constraining and prohibitive, rather than steadying.

Let us be careful to recall dilemma #1 above – leaders must do both forms of work, improving and creating.



We cannot live into the changed mission field without both. But be clear that denominational polity privileges improvement, while more frequently disallowing creation. We cannot abandon our denominational polity, and we must continually shape and reshape it so that it stays tuned to the more modest changes of ministry with the affiliated. However, we cannot be overly constrained by polity when facing deeper change and a new mission field of the unaffiliated.

Polity will not serve us well with the unaffiliated who are not attracted to organized religion. For example, it appears that the unaffiliated prefer small faith community settings where intimate relationships form around clear purpose. One of our bishops in the Northeast was introduced to such a small Christian community developed through the passion of two young men. The two men, feeling a deep connection to the theology of Wesleyan Methodism, came inquiring how their small community might become United Methodist. The bishop faithfully and fruitfully helped them make the transition. The results were somewhat disastrous, as the leaders had to conform to rules of credentialing and deployment while the small intimate community they formed was judged not up to the standards of a congregation.

Denominational polity and practice requires that new church starts grow in average attendance to 125 to 150 people in order to be chartered by the denomination. The chartering of such new congregations serves the affiliated well, and also conforms to a size that can economically afford full-time appointed clergy. How does a denomination receive, or help form, small disciple-making faith communities of 15 to 25 people who would choose to share our identity, but not our practice? How do our bishops negotiate the disconnect between ministry to the affiliated and the unaffiliated? Consider the bishop who was approached by a young clergywoman who wanted the freedom of an appointment to work with the unaffiliated through the formation of a small faith community that would not conform to denominational polity – but who also wanted the denominational guarantee of an appointment with full salary and benefits which were well beyond the capacity of the small community she hoped to form.

In my book, *Back to Zero*, in which I argued that we need to lean away from institutional ways in order to recapture our earlier form as a movement, I made the case for “breaking rules.” “Movement rule breakers see greater purpose and therefore risk different behaviors or practices for missional ends.”<sup>v</sup> While I still believe that there are times when rule breaking is in order, there is much yet for us to learn about how to use our polity in efforts of improvement but how not to be constrained by that same polity in efforts of creation. How do we honor where we came from, and also honor where we are called to go?

**DILEMMA #3 – YOU CAN’T LEAD EFFORTS OF CREATING WITHOUT BEING CREDENTIALLED AS A LEADER. AT THE SAME TIME, IT IS HARD FOR CREDENTIALLED LEADERS TO SEE THE NEED FOR THE DEEP CHANGE OF CREATING.**

This third dilemma speaks right to the heart of the double bind of the best of our leaders. One cannot lead extensive change in an institution if one is not, himself or herself, of the making



of that institution. Yet having been made by the institution, it is difficult to address the need for extensive change. It is a matter of credentialing.

In other places I have written about Paul's self-identification in the letter to the Philippians.

*If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, A Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.*  
(3: 4-6 NRSV)

Paul's reason for presenting himself in such a way was that he was credentialing himself so that his audience would be willing to listen. Clearly, he was no outsider to the people he was addressing; nonetheless, he offered "proof" of his background so that his teachings could not be dismissed. A leader has to have institutional credentials and connection to the people, or won't be heard.

Leaders do not lead without followers, and followers do not recognize leaders who do not demonstrate their fit with the people. Consider the bishops of our church. They are highly credentialed people. Indeed, one is not elected to the episcopacy if the credentials are not in place and of excellence. One must be trained theologically through an accredited seminary, credentialed by a Board of Ordained Ministry, appointed to assignments in which leadership was well demonstrated, served the institutional structure of the annual conference (and perhaps the jurisdiction and general church as well) and demonstrated clarity and capacity all along the way. To acquire the institutional credentials requires excellence at managing and improving the system **as it is**. Were it not so, one would not be elected to the office. Were it not so, others in the church would not give credence to what a bishop said and would not follow where a bishop sought to lead.

The double bind is that the process of credentialing makes one a deep insider to the very institution that needs to change.

Our best leaders experience themselves as both the problem and the solution. There are two issues at stake here. The first is the issue of position. The very position of a leader puts him or her in the central location of an institution. It is the problem of the "giant hairball" described by Gordon McKenzie.<sup>vi</sup> Over time, with a steady accretion of rules, judgments, norms, policies and practices, mature organizations and institutions become like a giant hairball with twisted and interconnected constraints that make it increasingly difficult for the organization to actually address its purpose. The external mission of the organization becomes secondary to the internal management of its structure. If one wanted to bring change to such an organization, to step into a position of leadership requires full credentials that support one's rise to such leadership. However, stepping into the leader's position at the center of the organization now makes one responsible for the rules, judgments, norms, policies and practices. Credentialed leaders are not rewarded for changing the organization, but for caring for the organization as it is.





The second issue is one of perception. Perhaps even more difficult is the reality that, once credentialed as a leader, it is actually more difficult to see the need to change. To be credentialed is to be part of the inside of the organization. To live deeply inside the organization makes it difficult to see life as it is lived outside of the organization. I am often intrigued by the surprise registered by clergy on vacation, or upon retirement, when they do not have the responsibility of driving to their church early each Sunday morning to prepare to lead worship. Without the Sunday regimen, they move about their community at leisure on Sunday morning, surprised by all of the activities that invite or demand attention of those not required to be in church. Having been inside so long, they are surprised by the outside world.

The issue of credentialed leadership, and the long-practiced perspective of an inside view, is one of the contributors to dilemma #1 in which leaders work on improvement, but assume that it is creation. Being unaware and insulated from the deep cultural change that would prompt people to be spiritual, but not religious, tempts leaders to think that becoming better at being religious would resonate with people seeking to be spiritual.

#### **DILEMMA #4 –“PEOPLE DO WHAT THEY ARE PAID TO DO, NOT WHAT THEY ARE ASKED TO DO.”**

This new version of an older organizational truth, from friend Bruce Hartman, provides the reality check that is needed to understand why, in a time of very deep cultural change, so much organizational effort is expended in managing what already is. We ask much of our leaders. However, we only reward certain leadership efforts and behaviors, no matter what we ask. In this difference between what we ask and what we reward, we should not be surprised that people follow the rewards.

Our reward system is slanted toward the internal care of our institution, despite our verbal allegiance to our purpose of making disciples and transforming the world. The way in which Robert Quinn addressed this was through the distinction between the public goals and the private goals of an organization.<sup>vii</sup> He speaks of public goals as the way in which the organization presents itself. However, behind these public goals are operative goals that override espoused public goals because the operative goals are there to satisfy the constituents within the organizational system.

We ask our bishops and district superintendents to be missional strategists, suggesting that they cut new paths into the changed culture. We ask our clergy to make disciples and to involve their congregations in changing the communities in which they are located. We ask our members to discipline themselves in new (but ancient) ways to change their own lives and the world in which they live. All brave and bold challenges. But what we reward (what we pay them for) is quite different. What we reward in our leaders is more focused on the management of what is and the care of the people who are already a part of the institution, as reflected in the chart below:



WHAT BISHOPS REWARD THEIR STAFF FOR:	WHAT CONGREGATIONS REWARD CONFERENCE STAFF FOR:	WHAT CONGREGATIONS REWARD THEIR CLERGY AND LEADERS FOR:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Problem solving</li> <li>■ Management and efficiency</li> <li>■ Human resource management</li> <li>■ Financial stability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Problem solving</li> <li>■ Resources and resourcing</li> <li>■ Relationship and caring</li> <li>■ Reduction in costs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Pastoral care</li> <li>■ Stability and security</li> <li>■ Opportunities for personal meaning seeking</li> <li>■ A peaceful and accepting congregational community</li> </ul>

**DILEMMA #5 – NEITHER IMPROVEMENT, NOR CREATION, HAS A GOOD ECONOMIC MODEL.**

*In the graphic that introduced Challenge #2 above, I noted that leaders were to now learn to direct their attention and resources to both...*

- The unaffiliated, post-denominational mission field (creation)  
and
- The affiliated, deeply denominational mission field (improvement)

It is critical to recognize that this challenge to direct resources in two very different directions, simultaneously, comes at a time of shrinking resources. Ours is not the time of growing resources to support a growing challenge. Ours is a moment of shrinking resources of money and people when the demand on those shrinking resources is doubling. Because of our shrinking resources, let us be clear that neither ministry with the affiliated, nor ministry with the unaffiliated, have a good economic model that will easily sustain their efforts.

Ministry to the affiliated is primarily done through our local congregations already in place in our communities. These are congregations which, in the aggregate, are getting older, losing average attendance in worship, struggling with older buildings requiring maintenance, and increasingly less able to pay for professional leadership. Annual conferences, in turn, project less giving to apportionments, less money available among the congregations to support professional ministry, and larger claims on their missional dollars.

As currently constructed, our denominational system of local congregations, conferences and the general church, cannot sustain itself, let alone fund new creations of ministry to the unaffiliated, with the current economic model.

Ministry to the unaffiliated is primarily done through informal gatherings and newly developing small, intimate communities which do not have the capacity, nor feel the need, to sustain themselves through the giving of the participants. The prevailing model for our denomination in the past was to approach ministry to the unaffiliated as “experiments” that are, by design, funded or subsidized by resources



from the denomination. Such funding by the established institution of the church, directed to missional expressions of ministry (think foreign missions in an earlier age), was once standard practice in an age when the established institution lived with expanding resources. No longer the case, we can no longer assume that the church of the affiliated will be able to support ministry among the unaffiliated.

When both expressions of ministry, to the affiliated and the unaffiliated, have insufficient economic models, it is time to rethink the way in which we require congregations/faith communities to use human, dollar, missional and facility resources. When facing into a time in which the fundamental conditions of ministry are changing, problem solving must be replaced by adaptive thinking.

### **CHALLENGE #3: THE NEED TO THINK AND ACT IN TWO DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS**

Following our five dilemmas of leadership, we now come to the third challenge for leaders who are asked to lead in the both/and time of massive cultural shifts accompanied by only modest daily differences; asked to lead ministry to the affiliated and simultaneous to the unaffiliated; asked to mount efforts of improvement while also mounting efforts to create new forms of Christian community and practice.

It has been noted that when a paradigm shifts, the old paradigm doesn't go away as the new paradigm is being birthed. Those who lead in a time of deep paradigmatic change need to learn how to both bring change to what is, as well as produce change that will result in what is not yet. Each of these modes of work requires different forms of thinking and assumptions. Let's look at both modes in comparison with one another.

**Working with "what is"** depends heavily on a linear form of thinking that begins with what we already have and what we already know and seeks to adapt or improve it to better serve what we already know how to do. This work is familiar in that it asks that we start with what is known and familiar and move forward (i.e., linearly from left to right) from present to future, from current reality to preferred difference.



An example of an outcome seeking to improve the current situation begins with what is and tries to make it better. It works from the present, forward into the future.



**Working with “what is” asks familiar responses from leaders.**

**This work depends upon:**

- Problem solving and technical work
- Linear, straight forward, strategic planning
- Attention to low-hanging fruit (new church starts, younger leaders, vital congregational practices)
- Alignment of resources

Working with **“what is not yet”** is quite different and depends upon discontinuous thinking that describes a preferred future that will be based on what we do not yet know how to do. This work is much less familiar and feels riskier, depending upon experiments as likely to fail as to succeed. Rather than work in a linear mode (thinking from left to right), leaders have to reverse their thinking - jump out into an unknown future to name what needs to be, and then “work backwards” to ask what resources are needed, what strategies can be developed, to achieve discontinuous change.

An example of an outcome seeking a preferred future names what is not yet and then works backwards to discover what is needed to make the change.



**Working with “what is not” asks foreign approaches from leaders. This work depends upon:**

- Boldness and courage to name unknown outcomes
- Non-linear experiments
- A willingness to proceed as a learning organization (ready – fire – aim)
- Non-synoptic leadership<sup>viii</sup> in which leaders work primarily with those who have a passion for change, but in which leaders do not seek agreement or the participation of all

**We will start four new congregations in the next two years to serve people similar to our current constituency by developing satellite campuses in our most vital churches.**

**We will establish four new faith communities in the next two years that are “non-congregational” in form, in order to serve people not drawn to institutions, and which do not depend upon current economic models of congregations that require a minimum number of participants for self-sustainability.**





## **CONCLUSION: THE THREE CONVERSATIONS OF LEADERSHIP**

Throughout this paper, I have been talking about two different demands on leadership: linear and discontinuous leadership; ministry with the affiliated and with the unaffiliated. The more accurate reality is that this both/and moment requires leaders to have at least three different conversations:

### **1. The conversation about improving:**

- Maximizing strength by resourcing it
- Rewarding growth over effort
- Recruiting and supporting entrepreneurialism (finding movement people willing to risk beyond the established norms)
- Finding and picking low-hanging fruit
- Redirecting attention and resources away from non-missional or subsidized activities

### **2. The less verbal (or silent) conversation about maintenance, which everyone assumes:**

- Redirecting shrinking resources away from subsidy and entitlement
- Escaping the “tyranny of the all” (in which everyone wants equal treatment) in favor of the readiness of the few
- Honoring people and congregations living beneath the threshold of mission, without resourcing them
- Stabilizing a shrinking system

### **3. The risky conversation about creating new:**

- Practicing boldness by naming outcomes that are not easily achieved
- Decision-making by purpose rather than democracy or fairness
- Experimenting with an eye to culling out quick failures
- Learning what can't be taught, by drawing upon experience in the field to instruct next steps
- Practicing courage by leading without regard for reward



At a time in which gradual progression in change (the daily sameness of routines and patterns) is mixed with punctuated equilibrium in change (the radical discontinuous shifts in technology, values and culture), leaders must be fluent in all three of these conversations. The real genius of leadership in such a time of both/and is for the leader to know which conversation is needed, and which conversation he or she is leading at any particular moment.

God is doing a new thing. Now it  
springs forth. Do you not perceive it?  
It is hard work, but leaders need to know  
what they are looking at.



- i Michael Fullan, *Leading in a Culture of Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001) p.v.
- ii Alpesh Bhatt, *The Triple-Soy Decaf Latte Era* (The Center for Leadership Studies, 2012) p.5.
- iii Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970).
- iv Paul Taylor, *The Next America: Boomers, Millennials, and the Looming Generational Showdown* (New York: Public Affairs, 2014) p.30.
- v Gil Rendle, *Back to Zero: The Search to Rediscover the Methodist Movement* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011) p.27.
- vi Gordon MacKenzie, *Orbiting the Giant Hairball* (New York: Viking Press, 1998).
- vii Robert Quinn, *Deep Change: Discovering the Leader Within* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1996) p.91.
- viii For a fuller discussion of “disorderly” or “non-synoptic” planning which is meant to be intentionally messy, see Gil Rendle, *Journey in the Wilderness: New Life for Mainline Churches* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010) pp. 120-122.

© Copyright 2015. Texas Methodist Foundation. Non-altered reproduction and distribution with appropriate attribution and/or citation is encouraged and authorized without prior consent from Texas Methodist Foundation. Please contact Teri Fichera at [tfichera@tmf-fdn.org](mailto:tfichera@tmf-fdn.org) or 800/933-5502 for reprints and, as a courtesy, to report use.

