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Creating “Breadlike” Boards



by Charles M. Olsen

Many new board members expect board participation will be an opportunity for personal faith development only to find a long, parliamentary-ordered, business-as-usual meeting. While asking for bread, they felt they had been given a stone.

“Stonelike” boards are those that do not attend to personal needs and aspirations. Stonelike boards try to make too many decisions. Dr. Tom Savage, president of Rockhurst College, observes that most boards can make only one or two good decisions in a given meeting (perhaps a year!). Considering this, adequate time and attention should be given to the really big issues over a span of meetings. Stonelike board meetings are repetitious. Stonelike boards are seduced into acting as a committee of the whole in response to incomplete committee reports or half-baked recommendations. Stonelike boards rely upon and are partial to assertive, verbal, and left-brain-oriented people. Stonelike boards rush to judgment, making decision with inadequate lead and reflection time, with inadequate information, and without prayerful discernment. Stonelike board meetings may be cut and dried, with the real decisions having already been made by the pastor or staff, Board members are left with little power to act or lead.

“Breadlike” boards allow for bonding and trust to build as a community of faith is formed. Breadlike meetings are centered and focused by scripture on images of God and the people of God in community. Breadlike meetings take the time to prayerfully discern God’s leading and call. Breadlike boards have farmed out many operational decisions, entrusting them to other people and groups that have been empowered and commissioned to act. Breadlike boards look at the “whole forest” and to its future. Breadlike meetings integrate inspiration with governance and feel more like “worship” than meeting.

One pastor observed that board members, looking toward adjournment, tended to “check-off” each report, wondering what time the meeting would be finished. He saw committee chairs animated while making their own reports but lethargic and passive during other reports. Commitment and energy were funneled into long-standing emotional and financial turfs. The structure of the meeting discouraged shared visioning.

Careful consideration in planning the agenda for a meeting is every bit as important as planning for worship. Like the communion table, the board table should be viewed as “holy ground”. If a meeting is to be worshipful work, with great potential for energy and excitement, much care needs to be given to its planning. A casual editing of last month’s agenda makes for more stale bread.

Here are some suggested approaches:

Replace Committee Reports

Story telling or history giving. Allow a portion of the meeting to surface these in general or in relation to a specific occasion or issue.

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Our Regional Leaders

Dr. Catherine Hubbard
Regional Minister
Janet Fountain Moderator
Jane Pekar Mod. Elect
Minnie Rigg Treasurer
Gordon Baker Secretary

Regional Board

Rev. Stuart Fraser
Western Area Minister

Dr. Catherine Hubbard
Ontario Area Minister

Russell Prime
Maritime Area Minister

Ed Stover
Western Area President

Rev. Janet Anstead
Ontario Area President

Rev. Gus MacDonald
Maritime Area Pres.

Terry Graves
Wyndholme
Christian Church

Shema Dizon
Hillcrest Christian Church

Awit Marcelino
Broadway Disciples
United Church

Rev. Dr. Ron Dakin
Secretary, College of
Churches of Christ



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Biblical and Theological Reflection. The master stories from scripture, when woven with our stories and reflected upon theologically, will produce a center, a basic purpose, and a focused mission for the church.

Prayerful Discernment. Decisions are to be "discerned" with a spiritual eye rather than through a rational or deductive process.

Visioning for the future. Take the long, unhurried look. Anticipate the fulfillment of trends as well as the intervention of God through the unexpected.

These four practices create the potential for an integration of spirituality and administration. They do not need to follow the same order in each meeting. Nor do they require an equal proportion of time. Sometimes one practice is more appropriate to extended gatherings or retreats. A committee may feel threatened as these practices are instituted. But that need not be the case if they can see that an agenda can easily be grouped into stories, reflections, decisions, and future planning. This framework can actually save an enormous amount of meeting time. The board is able to focus on what is most pressing, pertinent, and important.

Create an Annual Agenda

If a board or council can make only a few good decisions in a year, ask, "What is the most important decision that we have to make this year?" Pick the two to four major decisions and develop a process for consideration that ensures good communication, lead time, and prayer.

The rhythm of the church and program year lends itself to a planning cycle in which **committees** may need to report only once or twice a year, certainly not at every meeting. Their reports can include basic policy recommendations or future plans.

Prepare a Consent Agenda

Prepare a consent agenda in which all recommendations are in writing and listed together on a single page (or more). This should be in the hands of board members several days before the meeting.

At the meeting separate out any items for which people request discussion or debate. Remaining items can be approved with common consent. Some churches are more comfortable with an informal agenda that may not be in print. In this case, the presider can use a chalkboard; at the beginning of a meeting, ask members to identify stories, recommendations, or future explorations. List on the chalkboard any action items. Rank them in order of importance for consideration. This ensures that the board will give its best energies to the most significant decisions.

Create an Agenda Tracing Worship Themes

Create an agenda that traces the themes of the Sunday morning worship service. This method ensures that elements of worship including prayers, hymns, affirmations of faith, centering in God's Word, offering, commitment, and blessings are present.

Incorporate Prayers

Make provision for one of the participants to offer concluding reflections on the meeting. Reflections are not a recap of the meeting like oral minutes but a commentary on the process and significance of what has happened. *What really happened here, and what is the significance of it for our life together and for the church?*

The reflections may be pastoral. Often people stick their necks out in a meeting and risk more than they had planned to. They may feel uneasy and apologize, "Maybe I shouldn't have said that." The meeting's reflections might bless and affirm such a person's participation by identifying how helpful it was to the process. Naming the tensions, conflicts, or frustrations while affirming the board's resolve to hang together and be there for each other (as well as trusting God's sustaining grace) continues the pastoral role.

This reflecting role, which can be rotated through the group, raises awareness of the dynamics of board process and reduces the need for subgroups to conduct their own postmortem in the parking lot afterwards!

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Work with a Design Team

Invite a design team of several board members to work with the pastor in framing the agenda. Board members can rotate through the team. This move would further empower the laity and ensure ongoing feedback on whether they are ingesting stones or savoring bread!

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Parkland Christian Church Calls Charlie Ayuno as Pastor



Parkland Christian Church, Red Deer, AB has called Pastor Charlie Ayuno to lead their congregation. Pastor Ayuno is a graduate of Manila Bible Seminary where he served as class president and president of the alumni association.

Pastor Ayuno served two congregations over a 20 year period while in the Philippines—Balanza Church of Christ and Village East for 18 years.

Charlie is married to Grace Sulit, also a graduate of Manila Bible Seminary and the youngest daughter of the school's Vice President. They have one son, Ezekiel, who is nine years old.

Pastor Ayuno desires to be utilized effectively and widely by Parkland Christian Church. He welcomes the Parkland environment that encourages teamwork.

Immigrating to Canada involves many challenges and adjustments and Pastor Ayuno is willing and able to undertake this transition to prepare for the visioning he plans to do with Parkland Christian Church.

May God bless Pastor Ayuno as he fulfills God's call to Parkland. Pastor Ayuno's e-mail is: visiontrekker@yahoo.com.

Religions' Role in Keeping the Peace

By Rev. Dr. Robert Steffer

With the venue the University of Toronto Multi-Faith Centre for Spiritual Study and Practice which also co-sponsored with the National Muslim-Christian Liaison Committee a symposium, "Religions' Role in Keeping the Peace", some 60 persons of all ages came together October 7, 2008 to be a part of a panel discussion followed by a question-comment period.

Responding to the document, "A Common Word Between Us and You" published in October 2007 by "scholars and leaders representing the entire Muslim world and all schools of Islamic thought", the panel was moderated by Richard Chambers, Director of the Centre. The panelists were a rabbi, who everyday shares a parking lot with Muslims, a Doctoral candidate in Systematic Theology at Emmanuel College and an imam who chairs the Canadian Council of Imans.

As the apparent purpose in the abridged copy of a more comprehensive document indicated, the purpose was to present a clear statement from the Koran and Hebrew and Christian scriptures that the love of God and the love of neighbour should be the basis for peace and understanding between Christians and Muslims. Allowing for some nuances in textual criticism, the texts speak for themselves in fundamental commonality.

The panelists comments in general either focused on the document itself, finding it at the "101" level and hoping that it might lead to furthering a deeper consideration and/or some possible follow-up with Christians and Muslims which might enhance dialogue.

Four workshops were presented on Seniors and Violence, Family and Cultural Values, Global Peacemaking, and Young Adults. "Courageous Conversations with Young Adults" attracted young adult students and older symposium attendees. The Roman Catholic School Board proved to be an innovative approach to presenting "other" religions utilizing the "golden rule as a universal statement.

Anytime a group of Muslims, Christians, and Jews can come together to discuss matters of vital and common interest such as the resolution of conflict and the consideration of common themes in scripture texts is a useful day.

2008 All-Canada Convention and Encounter a Time of Mission and Fellowship

Pictures speak a thousand words and pics from this year's All-Canada Convention say it all. Many thanks to those on the local arrangements committee who created an experience that was "smooth sailing" for all.



Dr. Sharon Watkins, our College Lecturer and 3,000 pairs of socks.



Keeping a sense of humor and laughing at one's self is key to regional ministry. Thanks to Rev. Jen Garbin and "Lobster Louie".



Youth from as far away as Manitoba attended Encounter. Bright, shining faces engaged in mission work in the Digby area and attended the convention.



Pastors and spouses at the Pastors' and Spouses' Retreat. Dick Hamm, first row, far left, was the leader.



Jen Garbin, Russell Prime, and Bob Howell assist youth in painting a church in the Digby area.



The All-Canada Choir under the direction of Patti Pekar.



Rev. Tom and Diane Rutherford enjoying a moment at the Saturday evening banquet.

Greetings from a Green Guy in Milton

Hi Folks,



Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Chris Mansfield, and I'm an Elder at Milton Christian Church in Nova Scotia. Some of you may remember me as the guy who gave the seminar on Climate Change at our Church's Biennial Convention this August in Halifax, which included an introduction to the Alverna Covenant.

When I gave that presentation, part of my message was that all of us can, and should, be doing a lot of little things, that can together add up to big improvements to our environment. The environment affects all of us daily in many ways, and opportunities to make a difference, for ourselves, and those less fortunate than ourselves, are just as many and varied.

We Disciples have a tradition of supporting independent thought, drawing our own conclusions after prayerful study of the Scriptures. I suggest, because of our responsibility as good stewards of this world we live in, we do the same for planet earth, and spend a little time looking at the issues that concern our responsibilities toward the environment.

I hope, over the coming months to be able to share with you a few of the ways that we can show our love for this world that God has given us to live in, using our church's Alverna Covenant as a framework, and a starting point. I know you all share with me the belief that part of our calling as Christians is to bear one another's burdens, to love the unloved, to help those whose needs are greater than our own, and to be a voice for those who do not have one. Our responsibility to be good stewards of the earth offers us boundless opportunities to be the hands of Christ in this world. Join me as we together explore some wonderful opportunities to do ministry as we work to save the planet, and maybe save a little money at the same time!

Climate change is coming, indeed the first effects are already being felt. But it's not too late to make a difference. Stay tuned.

Chris Mansfield



The Alverna Covenant

Whereas:

God has created the world with finite resources

God has given to us the stewardship of the earth

God has established order through many natural cycles

Whereas:

We are consuming resources at a rate that cannot be maintained

We are interrupting many natural cycles

We are irresponsibly modifying the environment through consumption and pollution

We are populating the earth at a rate that cannot be maintained

As a member of the human family and a follower of Jesus Christ, I hereby covenant that:

I will change my lifestyle to reduce my contribution to pollution

I will support recycling efforts

I will search for sustainable lifestyles

I will work for public policies which lead to a just and sustainable society

I will share these concerns with others and urge them to make this covenant.

Milton Christian Church Establishes First "Green Team"

In response to a resolution brought forward at the 2008 All-Canada Convention (Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Canada Regional Assembly), Milton Christian Church has formed the first "Green Team" among Disciples congregations.

Following the directives of the Alverna covenant, the team will work to educate, guide, and fashion worship fostering an attitude among church members that will implement concrete measures that will address global warming.

The passion of Chris Mansfield and Rev. Jen Garbin to bring these critical issues to the convention and now embrace action that will bring the Alverna Covenant ever before us as a church is the first step in what is hoped will be a region-wide, nation-wide movement among Disciples churches.

If you would like more information on how your congregation can take the first steps to becoming a green congregation, contact Christ at www.cacman@eastlink.ca.

Please Note:

The Regional Office Has Moved.

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Springfield, ON, N0L 2J0

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5924 Putnam Rd.
Avon, IN N0L 2J0
Phone: 519-269-9800
Cell: 519-281-6626

Canada's Newest Ordinand Douglas J. Avram



On Saturday, October 18, 2008, Douglas "Doug" Avram was ordained into the Order of Ministry at St. Thomas Christian Church, St. Thomas, ON. Doug served the congregation for three years

while attending University of Western Ontario, Huron University College School of Theology. Doug graduated in May 2008 with the Master of Divinity degree.

Doug's faith journey led him from the Greek Orthodox Church to the United Church of Canada and then to the Christian Church Disciples of Christ.

Doug resides with his wife Lynda and their two sons in Aylmer, ON.



The 2008 All-Canada Convention was anything but dull. Thanks to the coordinating efforts of Janet Fountain and the Local Arrangements Committee, every detail for the event was meticulously planned and executed. As with any large-scale event, timing is often the most unpredictable monster in the closet. Yet, much like a wedding, the details seem to fall into place in the last few weeks prior to the event.

Our convention was bitter-sweet and exemplified Disciples tradition and theology. We gathered to learn from our workshop presenters and to take care of church business. We listened to our General Minister and President speak passionately from her heart. In Digby the youth cleared land and painted a church while in Halifax we gathered over 3,000 pairs of socks for local mission.

When such a large body of individuals come together to do the business of the church—and not just any church—but the Christian Church

(Disciples of Christ), there will inevitably be some Disagreement; it is Discipleship in its purest form. There were times during the business sessions I'm sure many of us felt uncomfortable but if we don't feel uncomfortable, then something is amiss. It is marvelous when the passion of our church raises its head makes itself known. Sadly, folks who give voice to their convictions are often labeled and some never lose that label.

So, I am proud to be a Disciple. I am overjoyed that we can talk about our faith and how we diversely live out that faith. Some churches may wish to adopt the Alverna Covenant and become a green church and other churches may ask "at what cost"? Whatever the discussion, we ultimately agree to disagree and so grow together. We have churches throughout Canada that celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly and others who do not; they are not any less Disciple than the next church. Our denomination is not based on a foundation of "musts".

I would be disappointed if anyone genuinely felt they would not attend the next convention. Where else can you stand up for your values (not beliefs!), go head-to-head with other Disciples and then share the body and blood of Christ on Sunday? This immense freedom we enjoy as Disciples, as simple and complex as it is, creates within us an unshakable faith because we are willing to grapple for it and over it. Because we shed blood, sweat and tears over our faith, our identity, we own it. Our faith is not the result of a preacher intimidating us with hell-fire-and-brimstone; our faith is hard won. It is chiseled out of the bedrock of discernment and the Holy Spirit.

Faith in action; that is what we witnessed in Halifax. It is understandable how we might reflect on the events of that week and comment "never again" but to curb such passionate commitment would be decidedly "un-Disciple". Disciples "get dirty"; we like to take our faith, wrestle it to the floor and roll around in it. Few, if any other denominations condone such spiritual journeying. If you were unable to make it to Halifax, I hope you will begin making plans to attend the 2010 convention in Ontario. I hope it is as lively as our convention in Halifax. As for me, I can hardly wait for the second weekend in August 2010.