

2nd Opinion: Endings & beginnings in the life-cycle of a healthy church

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I write these words in the midst of a most unusual week.

The first part of the week was spent in the home of my deceased parents. Their house is for sale, and most of the furniture has been divided up among family members. But there is still “stuff” to go through.



David Hull In the stark quiet of an empty house, there are papers and files to review for keeping or tossing, books to give away to the library, clothes to go to Salvation Army, trash to take to the recycling center. My body aches from carrying too many boxes down from my dad’s third-floor study.

The biggest challenge, however, was not physical. The hardest part was knowing what to save and what to discard.

Everything I touched had been important to my parents, but that does not mean it will find a home in my house or my sister’s house. Discarding something that once was important to people you love is hard to do, but it is necessary to move forward.

I left the work at my parents' house and traveled to my daughter's home to babysit my 2-year-old grandson. What a contrast in experiences, all during the course of a few days! Everything is new for Liam. Each day brings new friends at daycare and church, new words to learn, new books to read, new experiences to cherish. The sheer silence of an empty house is replaced by Pop joining Liam at Cherub Choir on Wednesday night.

No longer are there old clothes to throw away, but new clothes from grandparents to try on in an attempt to fit his ever-growing body. Signs, sights and sounds of life are everywhere.

The rhythm of healthy churches

Endings and beginnings.

Both are important for healthy churches. The same experiences I am going through in my personal life are the rhythm of healthy churches.

Think for a moment about appropriate endings. Events, programs, ministries, buildings, missions endeavors (and the list could go on to include things like prejudices, attitudes, fears), which were important to people we loved sometimes need to be ended. They do not need to have a home in the church of the future.

These often are hard decisions to make. What needs to stay around? What needs to be discarded?

Perhaps some questions will help you wrestle with finding the answer:

- Does this ministry help us accomplish our mission and vision for the future? If not, why are we keeping it?
- Will this facility be a barrier to our ministry vitality and growth? If so, is it time for an ending?

- Is this attitude or mindset within the congregation reflective of the mind of Christ? If not, then it is time for it to be taken out to recycling.

Healthy churches are able to experience appropriate endings. Through effective leadership, clarity of mission and vision, vibrant congregational conversations and collaborative processes, churches can move to appropriate endings for things that once were very important to members.

Healthy churches know how to recycle!

That is how families move forward. Everything from the past does not find a home in the house of the next generation. Healthy churches know how to recycle!

Healthy churches also know how to begin something new. If there is a need for appropriate endings, there also is a desire for energizing beginnings. What new thing are you allowing God to do in your church? What “new song” is the tune of your ministry? Are you loving the world God loves with the wide-open arms of a bright-eyed 2-year-old?

Perhaps some questions will help you think through energizing beginnings:

- Where do we see God already working in our corner of the world that we can join in and be a part of this mission—even if we never have done it this way before?
- What are the strengths and gifts of people within our congregation that have not yet been invested in ministry? How can we equip and empower these folks to speak the new words and sing the new songs of sharing God’s love?
- What is the human need around you that cries out for an expression of hope?

Isaiah 43:18-19 says: “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? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.” Healthy churches know about appropriate endings—“do not remember the former things” They also know about energizing beginnings—“I am about to do a new thing”

I look around the room at the home of my daughter’s family. In front of me is a chest that was in my sister’s bedroom as a child. Not all of the old has come to an end. Some of the old remains and is handed down from generation to generation. On top of the chest is a new little pair of boots to be worn by one who experiences new things every day. That is how families move forward from generation to generation.

The same is true for healthy churches.

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