



Potentials

I N P R I N T

Winter 2007/08

I N S I D E

This issue is based on
Potentials' 2007 conference,
'Shape Up!'

- 1 **Sustaining Innovation**
by Paul MacLean
- 4 **Making a Difference**
by Brenda Zimmerman
- 13 **The Church is also the Building**
workshop and consultation notes
- 16 **Isaiah 65.17–25 Discussion Process**

A Talent for Leadership

Sustaining Innovation *by Paul MacLean*

Brenda Zimmerman's article in this issue speaks to the roles of hope, humility and using one's talent in the work of social innovation. These qualities are equally relevant to leaders in the church who search for an energizing vision or a deeper sense of purpose for Christian communities. However, once the way forward is discovered, I wonder how that innovation is sustained. What makes for successful implementation? We often hear of how congregational transformation gets bogged down. The energy from the initial vision seems to have dissipated, the plans for new ministries that created so much enthusiasm somehow haven't happened, and the old constraints of not having enough people and money have resurfaced. Bold decisions are being second guessed.

Successful transformations in other social organizations show that leaders have kept up

energy and sustained change by concentrating on three things: clear goals, encouragement, and focus.

For example, the Ontario school system is going through a transformation designed to increase academic skills in two key areas. Leaders are concentrating their efforts on improving literacy and numeracy in students. They are using the best tools for doing this in the classroom and, importantly, they measure progress periodically against a common standard. Secondly, there has been a concerted effort to engage teachers as allies and to improve morale in the profession. Thirdly, they are not being distracted by other issues.

This example comes from a contribution to the recent debate in the Ontario election on faith based schools. The writer was arguing that the faith based debate is a

Leaders need to have peer support and coaching

distraction that has to be resisted if schools of all types are to continue to improve their academic standards. The example of the Ontario school system is one among many successful transformations that we can learn from. Social activists are calling for a similar approach to reducing poverty: establish clear and measurable goals, encourage leaders, and keep your focus. Churches have their own success stories.

Building projects in churches are often good examples of the three marks of successful implementation – clear goals represented by the architect’s plans, sustained fundraising that encourages people to participate in a common cause, and a consensus to put other pressing issues on hold until the project is completed. We also know that these successful building projects always have a shared vision that sustains them and is present throughout the implementation phase.

Many of the transformations we desire in the church are not physical. They have more to do with our changing identity – a vision for who we can be as a community of faith, and how we can live out that faith in new or deepened ways. This yearning is present in many congregations: they feel in a bit of a rut and talk of the need for increased participation, more energy and something that everyone can buy into. Yearnings such as these can flower into a vision for ministry that captivates the imagination and energy of the congregation and its leaders. People can see new possibilities that connect with their deep need for

meaning in life, and are prepared to give sacrificially to make these possibilities a reality. The sacrifice is often one of time – serving on a committee to organize a new venture, serving a meal in a food program, serving by doing a piece of research that will help the congregation improve its ministry with the people in the neighbourhood.

However, it’s the next phase that we often have trouble with. Does this vision for ministry get translated into a few concrete goals that serve as a standard for measurement and evaluation? Is there attention paid to sustaining the enthusiasm of those folk who are giving sacrificially (and attention to making space for newcomers to join in)? Do we tend to get distracted by the myriad demands that are the normal ebb and flow of church life? Sometimes the transformation isn’t all that we hoped it would be.

Unless there’s an unavoidable crisis that everyone agrees is real, it’s hard to sustain a significant change in the church. Like many other organizations, churches are better at maintaining their stability than they are at changing to meet new conditions (even if their purpose is to transform lives!). I remember how, as a clergy in two quite different congregations, I worked very hard at pastoral ministry. This is where I received most of my affirmation. Organizational change – in my case advocating for a more active role of children – was not universally welcomed. It’s tough for leaders to do both the work of

sustaining a community of faith and leading that community in a transformation. The sustaining work has a way of becoming all-consuming, and distracting us from the changes we want to accomplish.

In a recent workshop on spiritual resources for transformation participants talked about their leadership challenges. Here are a few issues they identified:

- Dealing with conflict, grief and obstruction: understanding and managing the emotional processes that accompany long term change
- The role of clergy: being pastorally responsive, but not co-opted
- The role of laity: bringing secular skills to congregational transformation
- Maintaining spiritual health over the long haul
- Using change as an opportunity to develop community and team leadership
- Dealing with the threats to the old identity and helping people move into a new identity
- Biblical hope and false hope – are we ‘doing a new thing’ or trying to restore the past?

This is a pretty good list of what transformational leadership looks like in the church setting. At the very least it means that leaders, both clergy and lay, need to have peer support and coaching that will help them navigate their particular and unique voyage. At *Potentials* we’ve always built leadership development and

support into our work. Now we’re looking at ways of continuing that support and helping leaders maintain focus through the longer term. Call us if you are interested.

In this issue most of our space is given to the keynote address of Brenda Zimmerman to *Potentials’* conference in June. It’s an inspiring contribution to the subject of entrepreneurial leadership from someone who is putting her Christian faith into practice in the field of social innovation. The last article is thanks to Norah Bolton, a new board member of *Potentials*, who has written up a conference workshop on the leadership challenges posed by building transformations. We held a consultation on this subject earlier in the year, and include some notes from that event as well. Finally on the back page, there’s a discussion process for use with groups on the well-known passage, Isaiah 65.17–25. We had a great time with this passage in the ecumenical setting of our conference, and we hope you experience some of the energy and insight it evokes when you apply it to your congregation.

Paul MacLean is the executive director of Potentials. 🐼



Making a Difference



By Brenda Zimmerman

Two of the key messages from *Getting to Maybe* I would like to leave with you are: how small things can make a huge difference in some contexts, and why our work is not just about helping or changing others but why we too need to change. I am going to weave in some stories from the book but link it to a bit of my own faith journey. And I cannot talk about my own faith journey without referring to the parable of the talents and the Book of Job.

For me, the message of the parable of the talents is that God wants us to focus on our gifts, using them to their fullest extent – which means taking risks – sometimes getting it wrong, but always trying and pushing to find out how we could make the talents we were given multiply to do God’s work. And we aren’t let off the hook just because we were given fewer talents.

Many of us have a deep desire to make the world around us a better place. But

we tend to think that great change – especially social change – is the province of heroes – an intimidating view of reality that makes most of us feel inadequate to the task. *This leads to apathy and inaction – or fear, which is further immobilizing.*

In today’s world of hero worship, the parable of the talents helps me. If we think of our heroes as those who were perhaps given more talents, the parable says we have no right NOT to act on our lesser talents. We can’t wait until the heroes fix things for us – get the politics right, clean up the environment, deal with the injustices. We are all called to do this. This is what the parable says to me. It tells me that I need to use my talents, whatever they are – especially when I am feeling most scared, and insecure – at the times when I feel like the slave who was given at best one talent. When I don’t feel I am up to the job is when the parable comes back into my consciousness and I know that I need to resist the urge to bury that talent.

The *Book of Job* has a message for me that links with this parable. Job, was chastised by God for being arrogant – for thinking the bad things that were happening to him were under his control. God basically said, ‘You don’t get it. I am in charge here. Your job is to do the best with what I give you but don’t be delusional in thinking that your successes are all due to your efforts nor are you fully responsible for all of your failures.’ To me the parable of the talents and the story of Job form a divine paradox – God expects us to do our best and push ourselves to contribute to the world beyond what seems possible and yet we cannot be so arrogant as to assume that the results (good or bad) are entirely due to our efforts.

Nelson Mandela, in a speech shortly after he became president, quoted a poem by Marianne Williamson called ‘A Return to Love’.

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented fabulous?

Actually, who are you not to be? ... Your playing small does not serve the world. There’s nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won’t feel insecure around you.

We are all meant to shine, as children do... . It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone. And as we

let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

Nelson Mandela used these words to talk about his own journey but he also used it to tell the people of South Africa that *every one* of them was to shine. The new chapter of South Africa was not to be created by heroes but rather by ordinary people facing up to their own ‘adequacies’ not their ‘inadequacies’. It was about realizing the power that is in each of us to use what we have, to start where we are and to connect with others.

I gave a speech a couple of weeks ago at Mohawk College. It was hosted by the Hamilton Roundtable on Poverty but open to the public. Afterwards there was a book signing and one woman whom I had noticed in the audience as particularly serene stood in line patiently and when it was her turn said: ‘May I tell you the story of my daughter. I think your book is about her.’

‘In 2000, my husband died of ALS, Lou Gherig’s disease. I then became the executive director of the local ALS chapter. That is, until 2004 when I had to step down to take care of my daughter Maddie. She was 12 years old and had just been diagnosed with a rare form of bone cancer which is very painful and has an extremely low chance of survival. While undergoing surgery and intensive chemotherapy and radiation, Maddie was chosen by the Children’s Wish Foundation to

Heroes
can make
us feel
inadequate
... we
become im-
mobilized



grant her dying wish. She thought about a great trip for us or maybe even with some friends too. But then one day she was watching TV and saw an infomercial from World Vision and announced to her mother that her wish was to build a school in Kenya for the children who couldn't go to school. I asked her to think about it for a while but Maddie was adamant. Her wish was fulfilled and although she was not well enough to visit the school, she was thrilled with the letters and photos she received. And then her cancer went into remission. Nobody expected that. When Maddie was well enough she went back to school and immediately began to work with her classmates to raise funds for the school supplies needed for the Kenyan school. But in June, her cancer has returned and we do not think Maddie has long to live.'

I stood there dumbfounded and moved to tears by her story. Talk about finding abundance and investing it to create more. Looking into her eyes, I felt I was talking to an angel – a messenger from God. I thanked her for sharing her story of courage and hope.

Getting to Maybe begins with 'Assume hope, all you who enter here' and talks about Vaclav Havel's coming to a deep sense of knowing about the power of hope.

When he was still in prison, serving a sentence of four and half years' hard labour for his human rights activities in defiance of the communist regime, Havel wrote a letter to his wife, Olga in which he said: 'Hope is a dimension of the spirit. It is not outside us, but within us.' Many months later he

wrote: 'The more I think about it, the more I incline to the opinion that the most important thing of all is not to lose hope and faith in life itself... This doesn't mean closing one's eyes to the horrors of the world – quite the contrary, in fact.' Havel said:

'[Hope] is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.'

That is the message Jesus' parable. We have to act on faith when we know that something makes sense – even when we don't know how it will turn out. As social innovators hope means having your head in the stars but your feet firmly on the ground – we need to face reality and not hide from it.

The so called Boston Miracle exemplifies this paradox of profound hope coexisting with stark reality testing.

Between 1990 and 1997, the number of youth homicides in the city of Boston fell from a high of ninety-seven to an all-time low of fifteen, a drop of some 60 percent. What happened in those seven years? The story is a complex one, involving many strands of circumstance and the weaving together of many dreams. We spent some time with one of the ministers who participated in the Boston Miracle, Reverend Jeff Brown, to hear his story.

When Brown was a young divinity student, his dreams were pretty straightforward. He wanted to build his own church and increase his congregation. He dreamed of owning a nice car and buying a nice house in the suburbs for

his family. In 1987 he became the pastor of the Union Baptist Church, in Boston's inner city, where youth homicide and violence were at their peak, and crack cocaine and gang warfare were everyday realities. Brown was appalled by this, and his first response was to improve the eloquence of his sermons. 'Every Sunday, I would make a very eloquent sermon exhorting people to fight against the violence. By the late 1980s, I was really becoming very good at delivering powerful sermons. I was the rapping reverend,' he says. And the pews were filled but the violence continued to escalate.

Brown's sermons were clearly not working, but he wasn't certain what to try instead. His own circumstances were getting to him. 'The violence was all around my church and yet every night I would get into my car, drive by the gangs in the streets, and go home to my nice suburban house and my nice family,' he remembers. Then one evening he attended a public lecture on city violence and was appalled by what he heard. 'The trigger,' he recalls, 'was this woman who argued that we needed to write off this generation and focus on the next one. And I realized that by ignoring this generation we are dooming the next one. The next generation will have children from the generation we are willing to sacrifice. Who will take care of the next generation?'

Who indeed?

Shortly after that lecture, a boy Brown knew well was murdered because another kid wanted his jacket. At that moment Brown reached his own personal tipping point. It was time to stop

hesitating and time to stop sermonizing. It was time to act.

He knew the youths wouldn't come in to him. He had to go out to them. It was a terrifying idea.

As he was gathering courage, another attack pushed him into the fray. A funeral was held in Morning Star Baptist Church for a young gang member gunned down in a drive-by shooting. As one of his friends, Jerome Brunson, entered the church to pay his respects, rival gang members followed Brunson inside, and beat him and stabbed him over and over at the altar until he was dead – all in front of scared and stunned mourners.

This became known as the Morning Star incident. The religious community was outraged, and suddenly Brown found he wasn't alone.

The religious leaders of the various congregations of different faiths in the Boston area called a press conference and denounced the Morning Star incident, gang violence and youth homicide. Then they called for all religious groups to meet and find a way to deal with the problem of violence. About three hundred clergy responded and, among these, Brown found companions. A group of clergy including Brown, Ray Hammond, Eugene Rivers and about nine others formed a 'street committee.' Their goal was to be on the street and connect with gang members – to meet the violence face to face. Brown says, 'We wanted [the street committee] to experience what was out there ... We agreed that the best action was to go

It is our
light,
not our
darkness,
that most
frightens
us.

The most important thing of all is not to lose hope and faith in life itself.

out on the streets and see what was truly happening and learn from the kids and about the kids.'

They decided that every Friday, from midnight to 4 a.m., the members of the street committee would go out in the neighbourhood and just walk around. Brown described this intrusion on gang territory as a collision of two worlds: the world of the people who had abandoned the streets for their safe world in the suburbs, and the world of the youths who lived and died on them.

The initial street walks were frightening excursions into a world of darkness and potential violence, a world Brown and the other ministers had studiously avoided in the past. The first few times nothing happened except long hours of being scared. The gangs watched the ministers; the ministers watched the gangs. And slowly their perceptions began to shift. Brown and the others saw the network of connections within the gangs. Each gang was like a family;

they stuck together and protected each other like a family. The individual members of the street committee started to reassess some of their biases concerning the gang members.

All of the gang members came from poor families or drug-addicted parents. Perhaps the gang was the new-found family. Gradually, as the ministers' perceptions shifted,

they began to see the gang members as kids creating and defending their own families.

Not so different, come to think of it, from the ministers themselves.

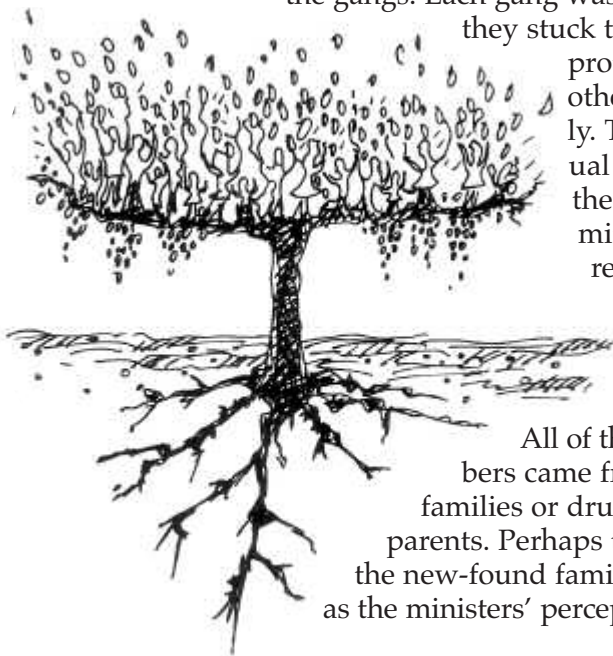
Then one night, as they walked on the street, one of the kids took Ray Hammond to one side in a dark alley. As the committee members stood waiting nervously, this kid told him about the things he had been doing (the crimes, violence and murders)... and then he said to Hammond, *'I seem to have lost my soul. Would you help me find it again?'* This was a pivotal moment.

Brown had bought into the myth that these kids were not religious, that they were materialistic and unemotional. But it was becoming clear to him and the others that this was not the case, and the divide he had drawn between himself and the gang kids finally crumbled. Like him, these kids wanted a nice car, shoes and brand-name pants. Like him, they wanted a family, and would defend that family to the death. And, like him, they also wanted a more meaningful life – even a soul.

At the end of the night, Brown realized, the kids and he were not that different.

The ministers walked every Friday night with the gang kids. They reached out to include other groups in the community, like the police, lawyers, the juvenile court system. They explored and found commonalities. Ultimately, they began to see a way through.

'We changed... I changed...' Brown's words



reflect a pattern that seems to characterize social innovation, revealing the paradox that wanting to change others means accepting a profound change in oneself.

I call myself an accidental AIDS activist – mine is a story about learning to be part of a process that, like Brown, I cannot control. My story about becoming an AIDS activist began with a paper I wrote several years ago with two co-authors. We searched for stories where we could demonstrate that by looking at the same set of facts through different mental models or perspectives, you could arrive at radically different conclusions, and hence actions and results. One of the stories that I contributed to that paper was the story of Brazil's approach to HIV/AIDS.

South Africa, which has the dubious title of being the AIDS capital of the world, has almost identical per capita income as Brazil. In 1990, Brazil had almost twice as many cases of AIDS as South Africa. Today, South Africa's HIV/AIDS infection rate is close to 20% (1 in 5 people) whereas Brazil's is 0.6% (1 in 160).

This intrigued me and I did some research to uncover what I assumed was a different way of looking at the problem in Brazil. I wasn't disappointed. I learned of a brilliant and effective way of asking questions that focused on hope, on abundance, on one's 'adequacies' rather than a typical problem solving approach which focuses on gaps, scarcity and inadequacies. They used the natural social network which existed in the society, but was invisible to most experts, to

spread the prevention information and to tackle the distribution of condoms and drugs. Over 600 charitable organizations, including churches, played a key role in shaping the success of Brazil's AIDS approach. It is a wonderful story of hope, courage and creativity. And it made for a pretty good management paper.

But chapter one of my journey to be an AIDS activist was humiliation. The Canadian Hearing Society had brought me in to help them with an intractable problem of their own. I decided to tell them the Brazil story both to give them hope for their work and also because I used it to draw a number of conceptual frames and approaches they could use for their problem.

Well after I finished my Brazilian story, I answered a number of questions about the case. At one point, a deaf Board member asked me, using a sign language interpreter, 'What was it that gave Brazil this perspective and the courage to take on the World Bank, World Trade Organization, the pharmaceutical companies and the US government?' (All of which is in a longer version of the story).

In answer to her question, I rambled on for a bit and gave a few cultural and intellectual explanations of why Brazil did what it did. She listened patiently, but clearly wasn't satisfied with my explanation. She then asked, 'What role did Christianity play?'

I repeated the bit about churches and nuns being part of the volunteer web used. She nodded, clearly frustrated that I wasn't listening, and asked

They began to see the gang members as kids creating and defending their own families.

‘OK, fine.
But what
role did
Christianity
play?’

again, ‘OK, fine. But what role did Christianity play?’

When you work through a sign language interpreter, time slows down and you can really pause and think about what is being said.

Oops... I know that Brazil is a predominately Christian country and yet I hadn't really taken Christianity into consideration. It wasn't lost on me that it took someone who was deaf to make me aware that I had been blind and deaf to some of the obvious aspects of the case. I paused and confessed that I hadn't considered Christianity *per se*. I had been very aware of how important the churches were in providing the resources of trusted volunteers and some of the infrastructure needed, but I hadn't thought about Christianity *per se*.

Since then, I have thought about the assumptions that Jesus challenged. *The meek shall inherit the earth. The poor are the blessed or lucky ones in society.* Over and over the New Testament provides examples of Christ's capacity to flip the dominant rhetoric on its head by posing the opposite. Brazil's answer was more Jesus-like than not. They opted for a universal program and worked at how to treat the poorest and weakest in society.

Christianity is all over this case. There are stories of Catholic priests who used liberation theology and the work of Paulo Freire (who wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*) to fight the AIDS epidemic in Brazil. They were instrumental in uncovering the capacity of the poor. The creativity that was unleashed

among the poor to create their own solutions and prevention strategies to AIDS was phenomenal.

The second chapter of my story to becoming an AIDS activist is one of mistaken identity. After writing about Brazil's approach to AIDS, people started to assume I knew something about AIDS. I was invited to AIDS conferences to speak and to AIDS think tanks. Each time, I was invited to one of these events, I felt the organizers had made a mistake, ‘I'm no expert on AIDS... Brazil was just a cool story to show how changing your mental model changes outcomes.’ But because I was learning a lot by sitting with some real experts, I continued to accept the invitations.

In June 2004, I was sitting in Princeton at one of these think tanks. There were only 24 people – they came from all over the world including Brazil, several African countries, even Mongolia. I was the only Canadian. And I felt foolish. A total dilettante. Every one else was a healer, a scientist, a minister of health, or heading an AIDS organization.

We were sitting in a large circle on the first day of this meeting and I was feeling embarrassed to be there. Why did I accept this invitation? What was I thinking? And then my thoughts turned to that parable – that one talent slave – that message of hope and abundance that is in all of us and is expected of all of us.

And so I sat there, and thought, ‘OK. So what do I bring to the table? And taking stock of my one talent – I



thought about how I worked for the largest MBA program in Canada with the most globally diverse student body of any business school in North America. What if I unleashed the power of business students to address this problem? I had never considered the role of the non-health corporate sector to address AIDS. And yet, most MBA students end up in the corporate world. So, how could I work with business students and their future employers to address HIV/AIDS?

With some trepidation, I ventured into the centre of the circle of experts and said that I wanted to look at this issue from the perspective of business schools. I had so little to offer in comparison with their wealth of talents and yet five of them were gracious enough to join me later that day. One was Dr Neeraj Mistry, a public health expert and medical doctor from South Africa who had just accepted a job with the Global Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS in New York City. Wow! Here was someone who really could help me understand how businesses could play a role in HIV/AIDS.

I didn't have a clue what I was doing but in my heart – or in my soul, I knew this had the potential to be huge. I acted on faith and hope. As Havel said *'[Hope] is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.'* This was all starting to make sense to me.

I already knew that 40 million people around the globe were infected, 30 million had died and increasingly this is a disease of women and especially

girls. I knew there were huge disparities globally in access to drugs and information. I knew this was a disease that deals with gender equity, power imbalances and ignorance. And the more I talked with people, the more I read, and the more I started to get involved, I could see that HIV/AIDS is not only a medical challenge but involves social, economic, spiritual, religious, management and political aspects. As such, it cannot be relegated to the health or government sectors alone but needs to be shared across all sectors. Too often, people in AIDS work – including myself up to that point – think of the corporate sector as a source of donations but do not accept the full set of talents that sector brings to bear. We throw away their marketing talents, their distribution channels, their strategic management skills, their political clout and capacity to influence public policy – because after all they are in the profit making world and hence have self-interest. We say 'No thanks, corporate sector – we can handle this without you. Just drop off your cheque on your way out.' But with 40 million infected and a disease as complex and devastating as HIV/AIDS, this is a waste we can ill afford. We have been like that one talent slave that the master threw into prison for burying the talent rather than investing it. By ignoring, or worse, deliberately rejecting the talents of *all* sectors to address the world's worst health crisis in history, we are failing to fulfil God's work. We are refusing to accept the responsibility of investing talents.

Today, three years after that meeting in Princeton, I head up the HIV/AIDS Strategy Studies for MBA students. In

My thoughts turned to that parable – that message of hope and abundance

And yet
every time
I act on
faith ... I
meet the
face of
God.

a nutshell, all of the incoming students, 800–1000 each year, who enter the MBA program are all required to spend a day with me on the global AIDS pandemic and the role of all sectors – with special emphasis on the corporate sector since that is where most of them will likely be working. Those who are interested in going deeper, compete to be part of teams that will engage with a corporation for eight months to help increase that corporation’s positive impact on HIV/AIDS. The third level of learning is for a newly minted MBA grad to work as an intern for six months in a corporation on HIV/AIDS (the same corporation that the student teams study). And the corporation pays for the intern since we want to ensure they take this seriously. Some of these interns now are employed full-time in the AIDS movement, both within the corporate sector and the NGO sector.

So I guess this is an example of how I *act* on faith. And a lot of the time it means not knowing. I do not know where the money will come from beyond this year or where the sites will be found. Oh yes... and we mustn’t forget Job. I know that I am a tiny player in this HIV/AIDS world. And yet every time I act on faith, every time I invest my talents, I meet the face of God – in the students who rise to the challenge, in my colleagues at the university who embrace this project, at the corporations, and in my own community. They have helped us and provided us with resources that we could never have imagined. Like Job, I need to remember this has very little to do with me. I have to remember to be humble. And when I fall – and I already have several times in this

project and no doubt will again – during those dark nights of the soul where I question myself ‘What more could I have done?’ I have to remember that I can only do what is within God’s will.

Brenda Zimmerman is an Associate Professor of Strategic Management at the Schulich School of Business at York University in Toronto. She is the founder and Director of both the Health Industry Management Program and the HIV/AIDS Strategy Studies for MBA students. ♡



The Church is also the Building



Love it or hate it, building issues are an inescapable leadership task. At our conference Harry Oussoren and David Harrison led a workshop that explored the many leadership issues associated with church buildings. Harry is the Executive Minister in the United Church General Council's Congregational, Educational and Community Ministries Unit, while David is rector of a rapidly growing Anglican parish in Whitby, Ontario. Their workshop summary is supplemented with comments by architects and church executives from a small consultation we held earlier this year.

What are the starting points? Buildings and attitudes?

- 'The demographics around us have changed, and the church buildings no longer are suitable for either church members or the larger community. We have too much space, the wrong space, not enough space, the right space in poor condition, or no space where it's needed.'
- 'Some of our congregations have to close. How do we do that with grace, and what are the options for the redundant buildings?'
- 'Our large, historic buildings make enormous demands for structural upkeep, often beyond the capacity of the congregation to meet.'
- 'Heritage – whether it's an official designation or simply an attitude of the congregation – is a two-edged sword.'
- 'Loyalty to a church building often becomes the "frame" for the spiritual life of a congregation, and its capacity to deal with change.'
- 'Faithfulness is often "stored" in a building. Can a congregation liberate its capital?'
- 'The capital costs of church planting in the traditional way are astronomical. New congregations can't assume the mortgage for such a venture.'
- 'Are we able to see our buildings as an "instrument of ministry?" Are they a club house for us or God's house for the service of the community?'

Are churches a club house for us or God's house for the service of the community?

David and Harry on the theology of buildings.

- The incarnation reminds us that we live in a both a material and transcendent world.
- Properties and buildings are neither good nor bad in themselves but part of the created order.
- Properties can have many functions – worship and community, places of beauty and inspiration, doorways to the Divine.
- Religious buildings are both places to meet God and to meet other worshippers in community.
- The value of such places goes far beyond the monetary one.
- The sustainability of such buildings involves much more than institutional survival.

Both leaders commended the writing of Richard Giles, the author of *Creating Uncommon Worship – Transforming the Liturgy of the Eucharist*. (Liturgical Press, 2004) and *Re-Pitching the Tent: Re-ordering the Church Building for Worship and Mission*. (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1997). Giles, currently the Episcopal Dean of Philadelphia is an Englishman with expertise in the design of space for Christian worship.

Giles walks us through church history from Abraham to modern times and notes our continuing struggle with buildings that have outlived their usefulness. He asks us to look with unprejudiced eyes at the major building type of our own culture – the shopping mall – and answer hard questions about how well our current buildings really serve as centres of evangelism. Many modern churchgoers, he notes, almost treat their church buildings as

historic stately homes where they are dues paying members committed to their preservation. It can be a triumph of nostalgia over reality. The parish furniture is a particular sticking point.

David related the valuable experience of another of Giles's precepts, – 'camping out' or moving into temporary space. When people have to change their place of worship it forces them to re-examine what matters and to identify less with their physical space and more with their mission. It is a viable experiment even for those who don't have to move.

Harry posed another challenge. Many churches – especially those with older buildings and declining congregations – supplement their income by renting sur-plus space. Rentals can include worthwhile sharing with a wider community at little or reduced cost or simply be a means of raising extra cash. The latter makes the building more like a clubhouse than a place of worship and mission.

Vancouver's Shaughnessy Heights Church developed an innovative budget by dividing it into two parts. One part outlined the congregation's ministry – worship, education, outreach – which was balanced by freewill offerings and endowments. The other reflected building revenues and expenses, including cleaning, utilities and facility related staff. They discovered that rental income was subsidizing the congregation's ministry at the expense of the building itself and its need for capital improvements. The new understanding meant that the buildings themselves had a ministry that was not merely rent but an investment in the future. Harry stressed

that partnerships can be valuable in sharing the responsibility for church buildings' continuing presence.

What wisdom can we gain from an architect's perspective?

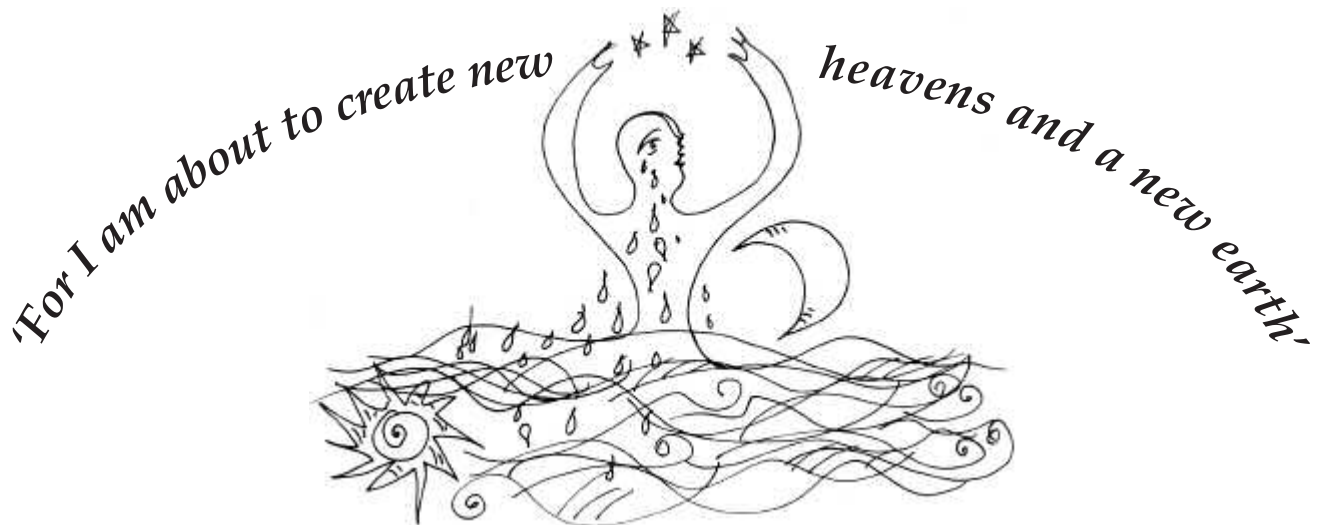
- 'In renovations the task is usually to create an appropriate space for the community. You are often faced with the need for smaller spaces and the existence of unusable larger spaces. Many older churches aren't well designed for getting around.'
- 'A successful transformation of the space has to start with the congregation and getting them to express their opinions. You can use a questionnaire to start, but you need to have congregational meetings. As the architect you listen very carefully for the three key or primary issues that will need to be resolved.'
- 'This will probably be the largest project the church membership will ever be involved in. It will be very demanding of the internal leaders. It's essential that the congregation fully own the project.'
- 'Ascertaining the budget for the renovation of an older building is difficult. Cost overruns can occur. In the contracting phase and thereafter leaders and the architect need to concentrate with the builder on getting the job done. Focus!'
- 'It's hard to convince a congregation of the value of an architect.'
- 'Architecture is a reflection, an expression and a support to a congregation's mission and ministry. Congregations think of owning their building (which they don't really, in most denominations), but the real question is for the congregation to have ownership of its ministry and mission.'

Church executives on building projects, including new churches:

- 'Sometimes the congregation gives the architect the wrong information. For example, one congregation built too small with too limited a vision, and the building couldn't be expanded later. Another example of getting it wrong was a congregation that built a gym when the real need was for flexible programming space. They didn't read the signs of the times – people weren't expecting gyms in churches anymore. They ended up overextending themselves and did a poor job raising the money. Both examples show a lack of imagination.'
- 'Does a new building bring new people? Renewal is what brings new people. The act of changing themselves, reflected in a building project, is what will make the congregation attractive.'
- 'Because congregations are usually doing this for the first time, there is a chronic lack of information and experience to share.'
- 'Many building projects are responses to immediate crises – e.g. the roof repair. We need to move from crisis management to think about the longer term mission of the church and how the architecture can serve that.'
- 'New church development: We need to think of existing buildings that can serve as churches even though they are non-traditional space. It's more important to be in a place where we need to be, than to have a traditional church building in a poor location.'

Recommended reading: *When Not to Build: An Architects Unconventional Wisdom for the Growing Church* by Ray Bowman and Eddy Hall. 📖

The act of changing themselves, reflected in a building project, is what will make the congregation attractive.



A Biblical Discussion on Isaiah 65.17–25

This passage was probably written after the first exiles had returned from Babylon to rebuild Jerusalem. Now, after the first flush of enthusiasm and optimism, there's a feeling of frustration and even despair in both leaders and people. The temple has probably been rebuilt, but the rebuilding of community has been a struggle. It's the gloomy 'day of small beginnings' (Zech 4.10). Into this time of low expectations, come these words of promise and provocation, a message to inspire people with hope.

Read aloud Isaiah 65.17–25 (have copies for everyone to follow and make notes). Give people a bit of time in silence to think about questions 1 & 2, then share in the group. Question 3 can be done individually or in small groups. The results could be offered up in a prayer.

Imagine that these words were addressed to you and your congregation ...

1. What emotions do you feel?
2. What are two or three phrases that seem particularly relevant? How could they apply to you and your congregation? (For example, what would it mean for God to 'delight in you' as a congregation? What 'former things' need to be forgotten in your congregation for a new creation to happen? Are there any 'infants' in your congregation who only live for a few days? What would it mean to have 'offspring blessed by the Lord?')
3. Choose a small part of the passage and rewrite it so that it is a 'hopeful message of promise and provocation' for your congregation. 🖊

Original artwork by Jennifer Mitchell
Layout and design by Gord Oxley

Potentials

A Canadian Ecumenical Centre for the Development of Ministry & Congregations
761 Queen St. West # 309 • Toronto, ON • M6J 1G1
(416) 504-3664 • potentials@bellnet.ca • www.potentials.ca

© Potentials 2007