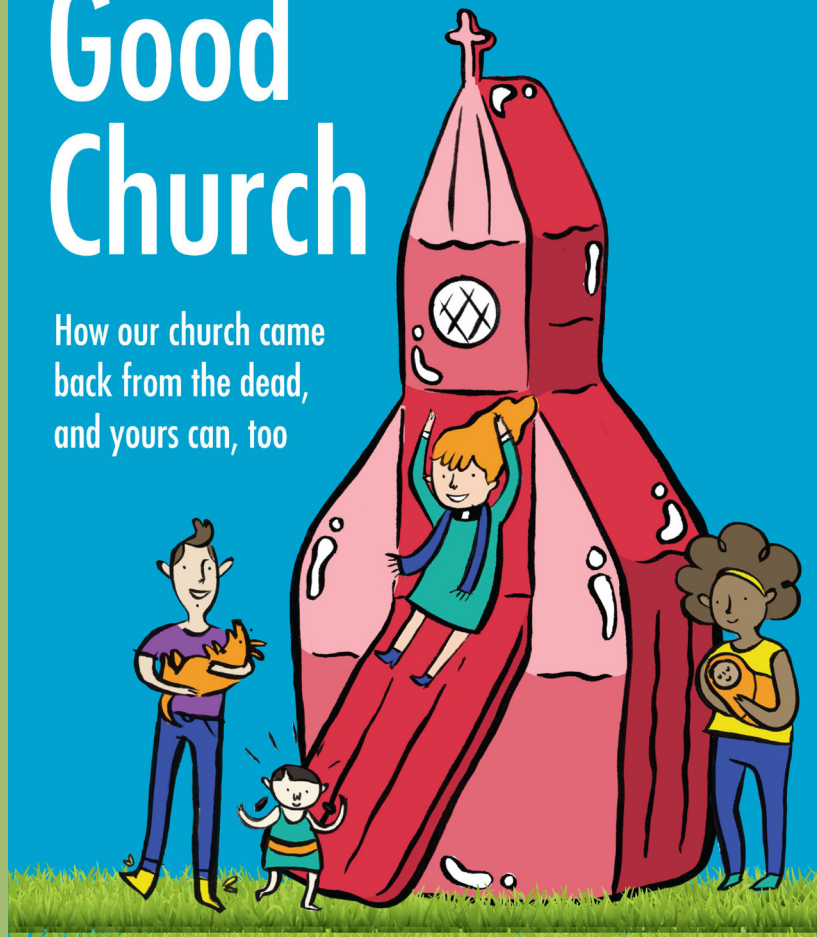


A Study Guide for

REV. MOLLY PHINNEY BASKETTE

Real Good Church

How our church came
back from the dead,
and yours can, too



the pilgrim press

How to read this book and use this guide

Real Good Church doesn't offer a theoretical framework for church revitalization. Rather, it is the aggregation of many ideas related to outreach and renewal, and contains rationales for growth and change management, particularly as they relate to functions of parish life.

Because most of the chapters can be read independently of the rest of the book without causing confusion if you haven't started from the beginning, you don't need to read this book serially.

My suggestion of how to work through the material in this book most effectively, without getting overwhelmed, goes like this:

1. Gather a representational group of leaders in the church. Include staff, ministry/committee chairs, officers and thought leaders for a six to twelve month book study. Make sure you have a balance of younger and older folks; introverts and extroverts; longtime members and relative newbies; and people who match the demographics of the community around your church, especially if the demographics are changing. Pay special attention to the voices of younger and newer people, who might be shy to speak up, but who have very valuable insights to offer.
2. Pray before each meeting and do some kind of interpersonal check-in. In our church we love "Pow Wow How": Pow=where life didn't go your way, Wow=something wonderful that happened, How=how you saw God that week. End each meeting in a time of extended prayer, silent and spoken.
3. At the first meeting, read the Preface together. Have some discussion about what you love about your church, and honestly share your fears for it. Maybe have some kind of activity where you put both aspirations and fears in a bowl and put them away until the end of the year.
4. After the first meeting, decide as a group in which order you want to tackle the chapters. You might invite special stakeholders to certain meetings (e.g. the Christian Ed committee when discussing chapter 2), so that the leadership for and the commitment to change is spread out throughout the church system and not delusionally hyperlocated onto one person or the staff.
5. Stay open and brainstormy when talking through the end of chapter questions. But do try to set between one to three goals regarding that chapter's focus before ending the meeting. Set a deadline and responsible parties for each goal (shared Google spreadsheets help immensely!). Periodically review your (growing) list of goals, whether they have been achieved, and if not, what the obstacles to following through are—with course correction.
6. Celebrate every win as you go!!! Loudly and proudly with each other, and with the whole congregation!
7. And have an end-of-year party when you are done reading the book together, to honor the commitment of the whole team.

Preface

What ideas or phrases provoked you, resonated, intrigued, tickled, or annoyed you in this chapter?

Who are you currently disappointing in your church? Is it for holy reasons?

What are the changes that need to happen in your setting? Are they happening at a snail's pace, a human pace, at the speed of light? Do you find that different people in the conversation right now are answering this question differently?

Who are the "true elders" of your congregation: those allies of change and renewal who have the trust of the congregation, can remember the time when they were first welcomed and asked to lead, and therefore give permission to a new generation of leaders to do things their way?

Doom, Gloom, and a Kernel of Hope

What ideas or phrases provoked you, resonated, intrigued, tickled or annoyed you in this chapter?

It's time to get real. Considering your church's savings and assets, how many years do you have left at your current rate of spending?

Which of the 10 Reasons for Going to Church most resonated with you? How about for others in the room? Are there any reasons you would add (practice using non-swirly language! Pretend you are talking to Nones and Dones)?

The Doomsday Pollyanna leadership in church faces the reality of decline but sees a different future. Is your church too much doomsday? Too much Pollyanna? Hopelessly head in the sand? Or a little bit of each?

Time out: assign a few folks in your circle to do some demographic research into your commu-

nity. It can be as simple as looking at the recent census data, or as complex and robust as digging deep into data available from databases like Mission Insite. Who is moving into your community, and are they reflected in your church? What are the stated values and priorities of newcomers to your community? Where is there overlap in the Venn diagram of their need and what your church is good at providing, or can learn to provide?

If you live in an area with little ex-migration or in-migration (steady population, not too many people moving in or out), what are the implications of this reality for your church's growth? How does this adjust your expectations for your renewal strategy?

Assign another person or two from your circle to study giving and attendance patterns from the last five years. Look at the data impartially, for what it can teach you. If you don't keep good attendance data, start now, with a simple spreadsheet. Knowledge is power.

Also: vitality is measured in more than hard data. Make a list of ten attributes of vitality in your church: emerging realities or accomplishments from the last one or two years.

Ninja-Level Homework

Preach a "mirroring" sermon or write a "mirroring" newsletter article in which you let the congregation see the "guiding myth" that has shaped and accompanied its values thus far along the way. Imagine for them a happy future scenario in which those values have been put to work again in a new endeavor, successfully. Let them see what they can be.

Chapter One

The Building

What ideas or phrases provoked you, resonated, intrigued, tickled, or annoyed you in this chapter?

Do a SWOT analysis of your building. What are the greatest strengths of your building? What are its weaknesses? What about opportunities? And threats?

Walk around the inside of your church together. Bonus points if you bring along a newcomer to church, or a friend who doesn't go to your church (listen to them carefully!). Does your interior signage use coded language? Is it clear, or confusing, to newcomers? What are the symbolic and nonverbal messages your spaces are sending? Who might feel welcomed—and who excluded—based on what they see, or fail to see?

What cluttered or underutilized spaces in your church do you need to address? Make a list. Prioritize DIY renovations, in order of ease. Put a date on the calendar for an All Hands Work Day.

Do an exterior audit of the building. What does the outside of your church say to passersby about who you are?

What passive and active signs can you add to the outside of the church (garden, flag, play structures, signs welcoming immigrants, LGBTQ folk, etc.) that will create interest and give your neighbors a clue that you are alive, and ready for newcomers? What can you do to stir, surprise, delight them and make them say “wait—this is a church?” Dream big—dreaming is free.

Move or change one TINY thing in the physical setting of the church. Pray over the object you have moved or changed. Ask God to open the hearts of your people to be flexible to shifts in the physical landscape.

Say a prayer of thanksgiving for your space, even if it is tired, cluttered, or desperately in need of renovation. Move through your spaces as a group, warming up your blessing hands and giving thanks to God for the hands that built it, for all the souls who have found sanctuary there, and welcoming new energy into the space.



Chapter Two

Children's Ministry and Adult Spiritual Formation

What ideas or phrases provoked you, resonated, intrigued, tickled or annoyed you in this chapter?

How does your church demonstrate that children and families are a priority? With dedicated, clean and lovely physical space? With a line item in the budget? With a commitment to recruitment/training/deployment of paid teaching staff? Or highly committed and accountable and energetic volunteers?

Do you ever do all-ages worship? What would the obstacles to doing worship this way be? Who might resist?

Talk with a cross-section of parents and kids in the church. Include both in decision-making about priorities and changes to Sunday school or all ages worship.

What are the three most memorable adult ed offerings your church has run in the last year? Were these also the best-attended? What was the last adult ed offering you personally attended?

Is there a disconnect between what you think the church should offer, and what you yourself are excited to participate in? What do you yourself need for your spiritual journey?

The author Barbara Brown Taylor said "People don't want more information about God. They want an experience of God." Of the ideas in this chapter (prayer team, Imponderables, retreats, faith-story sharing, etc.) which had the most appeal? Can you make a commitment

to do one new-fashioned adult spiritual formation offering each quarter, focusing heavily on relationship-building rather than information-sharing?

Action item: pare your membership rolls. Include only people who are actively attending and giving. Add people who are "stuck" to the church but have not yet formally joined (and may never join). Make sure they are on important listservs and communications, and welcomed into the full life and leadership.

"People don't want more information about God. They want an experience of God."

Chapter Three

Pastoral Care

What ideas or phrases provoked you, resonated, intrigued, tickled, or annoyed you in this chapter?

How does pastoral care happen in your church (hint: it's not just the pastor who does it)?

What are the congregation's expectations of the pastor re: pastoral care? Does your pastor feel stretched? Are there some individuals or groups in the church who feel entitled to more of the pastor's time than others?

Brainstorm

How can more of the congregation share in the blessing and spiritual depth of offering pastoral care to each other? (e.g. lay ministry training, prayer partners, small groups for all, affinity groups for shared theological reflection, etc.)

Question for the pastor(s): do you offer office hours, in church or out in the community? Do people take advantage of them? Consider offering "healing prayer" moments of extemporane-

ous prayer just before or after worship, or during communion, if you have an extra set of hands.

How are you taking advantage of extraparochial clergy, retired clergy, seminary students to provide extra bandwidth for pastoral care? Consider hiring a second part-time pastor as you grow, to provide extra "pastoral surface area" and someone of a different gender or gender identity, sexual orientation, color, age, or life stage, who may have more affinity with certain segments of your congregation.

Action step

Create a private Facebook group for your church where members can post prayer requests, job searches, church events, and more. Station "Facebook ambassadors" with a laptop at coffee hour to orient the tech-challenged to the joys of social media (backed up by incarnational relationships).



Chapter Four

Pastoral Self-Care and Administration

What ideas or phrases provoked you, resonated, intrigued, tickled, or annoyed you in this chapter?

Take a fearless Sabbath/Self-Care inventory around the room. What are your go-tos for restoring your spirit?

If healthy ministry is 10% inspiration and 90% administration, are you hitting that target? Are you dreaming too much and not following through on details and traffic direction? Or are you getting stuck in administrivia and not ever staring off into the horizon?

Interrogate where your time is going, as individual staff or volunteers, and as a community. Thinking of individual tasks and ministries, is each one really necessary? Are you doing it because you have always done it that way? Or are trying to live up to someone's expectations? Is there a better way to do it? Or does it need to be done at all? Does this task/ministry line up with your stated vision and strategy for meeting that vision? Take some time with this set of questions—months, if

necessary, focusing on a different ministry or core task of church each month.

What percentage of their time does your pastor spend on longtimers? What percentage on newcomers, growth, and evangelism tasks? If they are having trouble freeing up time for growth tasks and new people, how can you give them permission? How can you communicate to the wider church (more than once! And in multiple channels) that you have granted your pastor this permission?

Do you, like many churches, have half-empty committees and trouble filling open positions? Can you consider reorganizing your committee and team structures to govern with fewer leaders? What are the absolutely necessary functions of church leadership?

Would a Big Meeting Brunch-style megameeting on Sundays work for your staff and congregation? Would it make it more possible for newer and younger leaders to get involved?

*If healthy ministry is 10% inspiration and 90% administration,
are you hitting that target?*

What percentage of their time does your pastor spend on longtimers?

What percentage on newcomers, growth, and evangelism tasks?

*Do you, like many churches, have half-empty committees
and trouble filling open positions?*

Do you need to reorganize your staff roles and responsibilities to be more effective? Be careful with this one! Don't manage difficult or incompetent employees out with a re-org. It will just create conflict and ill will. If you need to make staffing changes, do it honestly and transparently, with a careful improvement plan that leads to termination if goals are not met.

How can new technology ease your burdens of administration, help you avoid redundancy or prioritize growth or community-building? Write down all the shifts you would like to make (listservs, website, digital newsletter, social media, etc.) and put them in order of priority and do-ability. Set deadlines and assign captains for each project.

When was the last time you wrote—or received—a long, carefully written email to someone else in church, about a problem at church? Can you all covenant to shift the communi-

cation culture to one that values calm, direct, in-person 1:1 communication?

Does your pastor have a pastor parish relations committee? How well does it function? Does the congregation see that group as their anonymous complaint box? If so, how can you shift their job description to be a confidential, empathetic group where the pastor can try out new ideas, share transparently about their struggles (assuming they also have other mentors and supports to “dump out” to), and talk in a mutually wise and supportive way about working through church tension and conflict?

In the “necessary skill set for pastoring 98% of our churches,” which two skills are you strongest in (this question is for laity, too!). Which two are you weakest in? Commit to reading a book, watching a TED talk, or taking a course to strengthen those skills.

How can new technology ease your burdens of administration, help you avoid redundancy, or prioritize growth or community-building?

When was the last time you wrote—or received—a long, carefully written email to someone else in church, about a problem at church?

Does your pastor have a pastor-parish relations committee?

Chapter Five

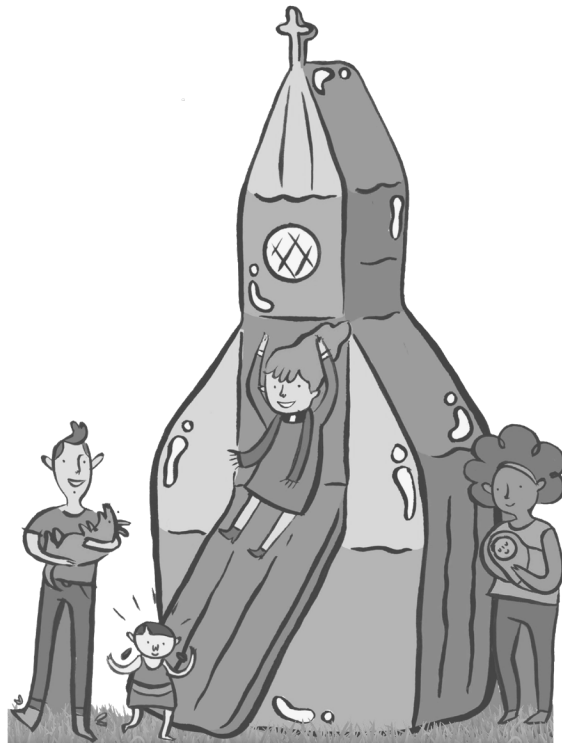
Outreach and Social Justice

What ideas or phrases provoked you, resonated, intrigued, tickled, or annoyed you in this chapter?

How does your church determine how much money it will give away?
What is the church's "story" around giving money away?

Is there resistance to—or desire for—sending more money out the door? Or a little bit of each? Can you consider pinning mission/justice giving to pledges, as a percentage of income, and increasing that percentage every year?

What are some other ways your church might support local agencies with sweat equity? What is one local relationship or kind of justice work you want to lean into?



Chapter Six

Outreach and Growth

First: consider breaking down this chapter into two or more sessions, to really take time to let the ideas and possibilities marinate.

What ideas or phrases provoked you, resonated, intrigued, tickled, or annoyed you in this chapter?

Where is the action in your community? What are the hubs, the big events, the cultural zeitgeists? How can you get into the middle of that action—with integrity, not as something or someone you aren't, but just as you are (or as you are becoming)?

How would you rate your church in friendliness on a scale of 1–10? (spoiler: you will probably say 9. Everybody does!) Now: how would you rate your church at “making outsiders insiders” on a scale of 1–10? Give concrete and recent examples. Our ability to assimilate newcomers (not all of them, but at least some of them) is the best test of our warmth.

Invite a mystery worshipper to church, a trusted friend or new neighbor. Give them this mystery worshipper checklist and ask them to fill out as much as they can (offer them a \$20 gift card for their time! It will pay great dividends). Keep a non-defensive and gentle mind when reading their reactions—this information is gold.

Celebrate a recent win in your community: talk together right now about a BIG thing your small church did, or a thorny project you finally finished.

Look at the demographic data again. Who do you suspect God is asking you to welcome next?

Take a neighborhood walk, in pairs, during your next Church Council/Vestry type meeting. Report back to each other: what do your senses tell you—and what needs they might have that your community could meet?

Brainstorm three “Just Them” events—community-building or fun activities that would appeal culturally to secular folks in your community. You don't have to plan them—just dream. Think about who is really there, and what would really be fun for them—not what passes for fun at church. ;)

Plan a follow-up “handoff event” to your biggest-attendance Sunday (e.g. Easter) to give visitors a reason to come back: a Parents' Night Out for those with young kids, a spiritual formation or educational event on a topic of interest to folks on the fringe.

What is your church's logo, if you have one? What era does it date you to, and what gender/color/culture? Is it time to come up with a new logo, tagline, or branding campaign? Who are you, in ten words or less (and don't use the forbidden word friendly, nor a single “swirly word”)?

Coffee hour: do first-time visitors ever come? Why or why not? What is the best thing about your coffee hour? The worst? What would it take to make coffee hour more robust and feastly?

Wandering welcomers: who are the natural extroverts, welcomers and bridge people in your church that help newcomers assimilate? Can you ask them to “reverse engineer” what they do (or use the Welcomer Training boilerplate in the appendix of *Real Good Church*) and run a training to make five or ten more welcomers, who will be “on the job” every time they are at church, especially for the thirty minutes before and fifteen minutes after worship?

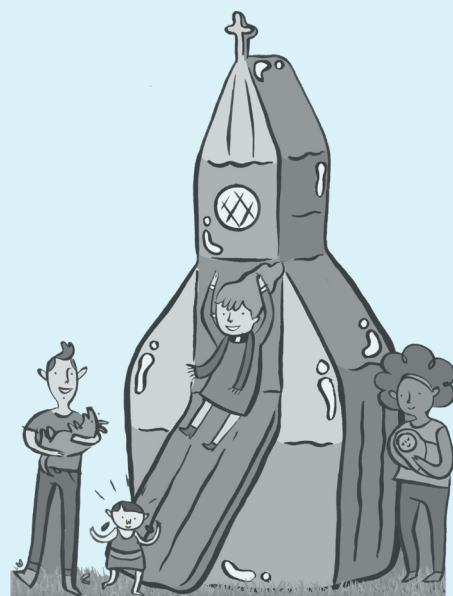
What is your follow-up strategy with first-time visitors (guest cards to secure their interests and info and prayer requests, hand-written note, hand-delivered gift, name tag pipeline)? Is it robust enough to make people feel personally seen and oriented to life in your community, without being pushy? (This will differ by region and culture.) How might you like to shift your follow-up strategy to be more robust or responsive? (Hint: it shouldn’t all rely on the pastor. Avoid the culture of dependency!)

Is your church in an area with significant street or pedestrian traffic? Consider running a cheerful, casual “outreach table” in front to offer Ash Wednesday ashes, a Christmas ornament, Easter egg with chocolate inside, or other gift pertinent to what is happening in the news or in the community (road race, parade, etc.), or have your church kids run a smoothie stand (hint: sell smoothie “shots” for \$1! It’s hard to say no when the price is low), with the proceeds going to natural disaster relief or a local agency. Invite people to leave a prayer request, or offer to bless them then and there, so they know for sure that you are a church. If your building is tucked

away, you can still do such an activity (with the proper permissions from city authorities) at a subway station, bus stop, or other hub. Let your neighbors SEE you being a church.

Does your church have an advertising budget? If not, see if your endowment committee will authorize a small sum (\$500–\$5000) to be taken from savings to spend strategically on: new signage, advertising in the local gym, mall or movie theatre, billboard, and my favorite: Facebook boosting and ads.

In the next three months, identify and volunteer for three new ways that you can be an asset to your wider community. Offer free space to a nonprofit for their gala. Incubate a new arts organization. Host an interfaith community vigil after a mass shooting, providing candles, music, and structure. Write an op-ed in the local paper, giving moral voice to an issue of political importance that will help people orient in their grief and distress. The more you think in terms of “how can we put our building or people to work for our city or town?” the more ideas you will come up with.



Chapter Seven

Finance and Stewardship

What ideas or phrases provoked you, resonated, intrigued, tickled, or annoyed you in this chapter?

How transparent is your church when it comes to money and giving, on a scale of 1–10? Is your pastor privy to the pledges? Why or why not? Who does know what the pledges are—and is this person in a position to foster financial leadership of the most generous people in the congregation, offer pastoral care to people in financial crisis, or call the bluffs of “spiritual terrorists” who withhold their pledges to get their way?

Consider pausing your work on *Real Good Church* to stop and read, together, J. Clif Christopher’s *Not Your Parents’ Offering Plate*. Commit to making changes in how you talk about money in the church, as you move toward greater transparency.

Have a deep-dive discussion amongst leadership groups in your church of these questions:

- + What are the messages and myths I learned about money growing up in my household? Do I know how much money my parents made? Do I know now? How have those messages followed me into adulthood? Have I passed them on to my own children, if I have children?
- + What is the difference between privacy and secrecy? How is secrecy toxic? How is transparency freeing?
- + What would it mean if my pastor knew what people give? Do they know other private things about us—and are they good stewards of that information?
- + Who is the most generous person I know? What has their way of life taught me? With whom or what do I feel generous, and how has it transformed my life?
- + How does Jesus’ phrase “where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” ring true? Give concrete examples.

Does your church pass balanced budgets, panicked deficit budgets, or growth budgets that require spending from savings—but strategically? Would you consider drawing up three budgets this next year (austerity, dream, and compromise budgets—the compromise budget being one with some juicy growth-oriented goodness in it), and recommending the congregation pass the compromise budget?

Brainstorm two to four radical pledge campaigns: a “tithes, and your spiritual life will dramatically change or we will guarantee you your money back,” hand out money to multiply for God à la the Parable of the Talents, or Google “In the Key of G” and watch Rev. Otis Moss do stewardship magic at Trinity UCC in Chicago.

Revamp your pledge card with “By the Numbers” shows of strength on the back. Reflect back to the congregation its own vitality. Consider adding two boxes for checking: “this represents a tithe of my income” and “Please don’t share my pledge amount with the pastor.”

Brainstorm brave souls who might give a transparent stewardship testimony. Ask key leaders to go first!

Brainstorm folks representing different demographics in the congregation (newbie, Silent Generation, etc.) who can write compellingly from a spiritual point of view about giving, gratitude, and their love for the church. Include a letter from them to their target peers.

Facilitate a shift toward electronic or automated giving. Aim for 80% of pledgers to give automatically. Ask the congregation to treat their church pledge like their utilities bills—keeping the lights on in their souls, and permitting the church a guaranteed uninterrupted revenue stream, year over year, so there is no end of year crunch, begging for people to fulfill their commitments.

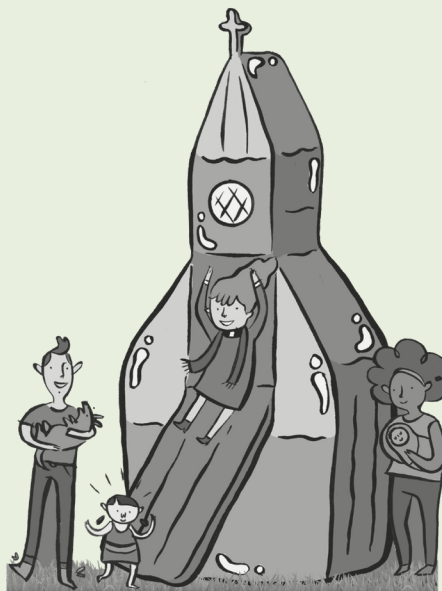
Identify three non-judgmental, spiritually mature, and generous people in the church to serve as “stewardship confidantes” who can help others who might want guidance to discern an appropriate pledge amount.

Host a “Faith and Finances” cafe, that can help others unpack the mysteries and phobias around their own money situation, giving and relationship with God.

Look for grants that you can apply for to launch new initiatives or positions that will become self-sustaining in two to four years.

Do you own real estate? How can you leverage it for stable rental income? Keep in mind, you don’t want non-pledge income (grants, endowment, rent) to comprise more than 35% of your cashflow—any more and the congregation will not be motivated to support itself.

Is it time to do a capital campaign? Why or why not?



Chapter Eight

Open and Affirming

Is your church open and affirming (or your denomination's equivalent)?

If yes:

Are you living fully into your identity? Or are you leaving some of the bounty and blessing of making that commitment unharvested? Is there unresolved conflict, perhaps embedded in a tacit and cowardly compromise, about this stand the congregation has taken? If so, how can you move forward?

If there is no unresolved conflict but perhaps some complacency, what can your community do to live more fully into your welcome of queer people? Make sure any LGBTQ members who are part of your community are part of this discussion. Listen to them and believe them. Don't be defensive if there are criticisms—learn from them. What is the next frontier in living out your identity and welcome? Perhaps it relates to moving queer folks into visible leadership, rooting out binary language in your opening welcome and hymns, putting pronouns on nametags, etc.

If no:

Is it time to consider starting this conversation? You might be afraid that it will split the church, but consider carefully that an overwhelming number of young adults (as high as 90%) are queer or queer-affirming. They are very unlikely to choose a church that is explicitly or implicitly homophobic, or afraid to wrestle with the issue.

If you are ready to get started, what resources do you have? What resources do you need?



Chapter Nine

Real Good Worship

What ideas or phrases provoked you, resonated, intrigued, tickled, or annoyed you in this chapter?

What are some “swirly words” (aka theological speak) that came up in your worship service last Sunday? How about in your bulletin?

How would you describe what you do in worship (be specific! Discuss: prayers, sermon, offering) to someone from another planet, in ordinary language? WHY do we do each of those things? How do they impact our lives in a meaningful and visceral way?

When do you most “tune in” during Sunday worship? When do you most “tune out”? Be careful and kind, but honest, in your assessment!

Creative interlude:

Write a jingle or a tagline for your church’s worship, pitched to Nones. What is the soundtrack for your commercial?

How did you react to the testimonies? What feelings came up for you? Do you think this would work in your setting? Why or why not? (For further study and reflection, see the sequel to *Real Good Church*, which is titled *Standing Naked Before God: The Art of Public Confession*.)

How do you do prayers of the people in your setting? What do people love about it? What doesn’t work so well about it? How “insider baseball” is your prayer form for newcomers? On a scale of 1–10, how much does it feel like people are really praying, versus just having a conversation with

each other (or a one-way conversation from pastor to people)?

Of all the forms of corporate prayer (pastoral prayer, prayers of the people a la Episcopal or Lutheran book of worship, extemporaneous prayer, some other form), which would you like to experiment with?

How racially or culturally diverse is your community? What percentage is the dominant group? Who is in your wider community—who is not reflected in your congregation? How does the visible leadership (staff, worship leaders) pattern or mirror the current congregation? When you next hire or recruit, who would you like to see more of in your leadership?

Is your congregation averse to “hot buttons” (e.g. issues of relevance but that might be controversial)? Why or why not? What past conversations have shaped your current level of tolerance? What are some issues you would love your pastoral leadership to address in worship—to provide moral guidance on in a confusing and chaotic world? Do your preachers feel they have the freedom to preach on whatever topic God directs them?

Do a bulletin review as if you were a New York Times book critic. Is it boring, swirly, or inauthentic? Set a small group to revamp the bulletin to make sure it doesn’t contain coded language and has plenty of invitational language to newcomers/Nones without explaining things to death.

Experiment with “blessing everything” in worship: one Sunday a month, choose a place to point your hands toward, or a person to lay your hands on for blessing.

If you were to gather an alternative worship, who would it be for? Who would you like to reach? What do you imagine they might need in a worship service (length, genre, format, art/ambience, engagement, leadership)?

Creative Interlude:

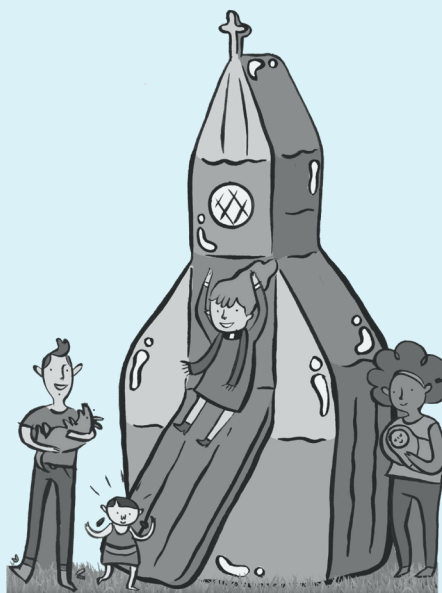
Pick one upcoming holy day (or make one up! Cupcake Day, PTA week, First Hyacinth Sunday) and create an all-new creative worship service to honor it.

Who are the “difficult people” in worship? How do you currently manage their needs and mood? How can you live more deeply into the 75% rule (in a growing, diverse church, you should only be happy with 75% of what is going on, because

the other 25% is for someone down the pew who is different from you), honoring the needs of the “weaker” members of the body of Christ—young parents, mentally ill folk—while remembering that “all people are welcome, but not all behaviors are welcome”?

Are there “shooshers” in your congregation? Who are they? How can you shoosh the shooshers to create an environment of radical welcome for children?

What genres does your community tend toward in worship music? Have there been “worship wars” in the past related to music? Is there room to expand your sense of what is “sacred music” suitable for worship? Who or what are the obstacles to a “yes, and” music culture in worship?



Chapter Ten

Leadership

What ideas or phrases provoked you, resonated, intrigued, tickled, or annoyed you in this chapter?

How does information, especially changes and cultural shifts, get shared throughout your church? (Hint: there will be more than one path.)

What was the last “big change” you made in your community? How did it go over? What could you have done better to win allies, communicate its importance and impact, socialize it gradually?

Consider asking your church leadership (staff, committee chairs and officers) to do some kind of self-study work: Myers Briggs type, Enneagram, Leadership Compass, Strengths Finder. Have them share results in mixed and mingled groups. See where you might need to balance or relocate leaders to make up for deficits in groups, to complement individual leaders (adding practical folks to visionary teams, Js to heavy “P” groups, systems thinkers to groups that get bogged down in details, etc.).

How do you train and equip new leaders (committee chairs, staff, project managers) in your church for their work? What are the gaps in training and community-building, or sharing of institutional memory?

Who are the young adults in your community (include teens). Think broadly: they may not be coming to Sunday morning worship but are engaged in your common life in other ways. Are any of them in leadership? If not, why not?

How old is your mission statement? If it's more than five years old, consider reviewing it or scrapping it and starting from scratch.

Do you have a vision statement? If not, is it time to create one? If so, does it state SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Limited)? You get what you measure.

Consider implementing a “spiritual gifts inventory” for your whole congregation, not just new members. Have folks who are good at matching people with roles pore over the results, and imagine new directions for leadership and ministry development.

Consider recasting your church council (vestry, etc.) meeting for the next six months, according to the rubric on page 162. How do meetings feel different and function after this implementation?

What do you do in church? What are your jobs? Why do you do them? Do you feel connected to the meaning and purpose of your jobs? If not, how can you remind yourself why you do what you do—or give yourself permission to let it go?

What size is your church, and how does its culture correspond to characteristics typical of that size church (a simple Google church will turn these up. Keep in mind that these characteristics don't apply so strictly in this brave new world of 21st century church)?

If your average worship attendance has plateaued, what are the factors limiting growth, or contributing to the energy loss?

Chapter Eleven

Church Conflict

What ideas or phrases provoked you, resonated, intrigued, tickled, or annoyed you in this chapter?

Did you go watch that short video, “Friedman’s Theory of Differentiated Leadership Made Simple”? No? Go watch it. (Update for 21st century: people are not viruses. But their anxiety is a virus.) How did you react to it? What feelings did it bring up? Is there anything you’re confused about? How can you apply these concepts to your own family of origin (this line of conversation could take two hours in itself)? How do you see them at work in your church?

Who are the unhealthiest, most anxious, and/or least-differentiated people in your church? You can think about them silently, or you can name them out loud if your leadership group reading this book is able to be that honest (and calmly connected!) with each other. Naming them aloud can diminish their negative power—and remind you how small a group they really are.

When people have left your community, how did they leave? Did they manage to take others with them? Did leadership acknowledge their leaving in a loving and healthy way—without spending a lot of energy trying to get them back? (Remind-

er: don’t pay more attention to the back door than to the front door—the folks just coming in, starry-eyed with wonder at your fabulous community.)

Where is your train headed? Who wants to go in a different direction? Can you be clear where you are going—and at what speed? Can you lovingly invite the folks who want a different destination to find another train?

Do you have a behavioral covenant you use when meetings or conversations threaten to be difficult or painful? If yes, great. If not, adopt one now—for when you need it. You will need it—and that is entirely normal and natural.

In a healthy, renewing church, newbies come first. How is your community on board with this idea already? In what ways do you need to change or make new commitments to live into this mantra?

How much do you laugh as a church, especially in dark moments? How can you give yourself more permission to laugh, and not take yourselves, or each other, so seriously?



Chapter Twelve

Epic Failures

What ideas or phrases provoked you, resonated, intrigued, tickled, or annoyed you in this chapter?

A lot of the new wisdom around leadership and change urges us to “fail forward.” That is, the riskiest thing we can do is play it safe—it all but guarantees church death in the age of acceleration and quantum change. But trying new things carries inherent risks, too.

Set an expectation for your community to have an internal expectation of trying three to six completely new things each year, and expect two thirds of them to fail. Congratulate each effort and the people involved in it, let it go, and move on. If everything you try is successful, you’re not risking enough. Edison was once asked what it like to fail 10,000 times to make a light bulb. His reply? “I have not failed. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that won’t work.” Rack up your failures—and be proud of them because it means you have a growth mindset and are willing to fail in order to thrive.

Revisit this chapter in six months and host a night of storytelling in which you recount to each other, not your church’s successes, but your failures! With tenderness and humor.

What has your church risked in the last two years? How has it failed? What did those failures teach you? What gifts did they give you?

