

The Exit Called Change

When you answer the call to become an elder or a deacon, you take the exit called “change” off the highway of mediocrity. Leadership in our congregation today means leading change. This is different from creating change. Change already exists. From the challenge of making Sunday School relevant to soccer families, to having a level of commitment in a time when people don’t join anything, but treat commitment as an option. Our culture is changing. The change we are experiencing is what Michael Fulton calls complex change. He writes, “Complexity means change, but specifically it means rapidly occurring, unpredictable, nonlinear change.” In other words, it is hard to see complex change coming, and often when it arrives it doesn’t make sense.

And we are not the first generation to experience complex change.

I am reading a wonderful book called *The Fifties* by David Halberstam. David writes about this decade of huge change and how it shaped the 1960s forward. In the ’50s we laid the highway system that led to huge hotel chains (Holiday Inn being the first). The McDonalds brothers opened their first restaurant in San Bernardino, CA. Levitt created the first suburb in New Jersey called Levittown. The atomic bomb that ended World War II led to the creation of the H bomb, that is 400 times more powerful. The ’50s became the tipping point when TV replaced radio, and entertainment began to overtake religion as the social activity of a community. Up until this point congregations of all denominations just had to open their doors and the people would fill the church.

The people of the ’50s who led industry, education, and religion were children of parents who endured the poverty of the Depression. These children fought in World War II and the Korean War, and decided that progress and prosperity would define the new America.

Our generation (mainly led by Boomers with a mix of Silent, Millennials, and ‘X’) is experiencing complex change because we are disconnecting from this view. For the first time the Millennial generation will not earn more than their parents. Millennials care more about the damage being done to the environment by fossil fuel, than the progress these fuels bring. The vision of progress and prosperity is being redefined in our culture and in our congregations.

So God has called elders and deacons, youth leaders and Sunday School teachers, musicians and custodians to respond to a new church for a new day. The “change exit” paves the way toward the future church. And God is calling all of us to be co-creators in laying the foundation.

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