

Embracing Change
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Satisfied Churches Don't Change

Alissa Newton

On the first day of my first call as vicar to a small mission congregation, I knew exactly what I wanted to change. It didn't seem big to me, but my predecessor had already tried to make the change unsuccessfully. His notes to me simply said, "Good luck."

The congregation had a practice of doing announcements and prayer requests in a sort of "open mic" style before their main service began. Anyone could come up and announce anything they wanted to – from a ministry opportunity to participation in a local play to the fact that it was their birthday/anniversary that week. If the announcement was pastoral in nature, the clergy leader would come up and say a prayer or blessing, as appropriate. They loved this way of connecting with each other and sharing information.

I hated it. There is nothing more confusing to a newcomer than showing up at the publicized start time for a service, only to spend the first ten to twenty minutes hearing a parade of different voices using insider language to make announcements about unfamiliar events in a disorganized and spontaneous way.

The Satisfaction Problem

I wanted to approach this change without seeming dismissive, causing unnecessary conflict or cutting across the equally important work of building trust in the new relationship I was forming with this community of faith. The biggest impediment to this change was simple – the people loved doing announcements this way. They weren't at all dissatisfied with their approach. I knew that this change would take strategy, intention and work.

In my work, both as a priest helping develop a congregation and as a consultant working with churches seeking to become more faithful, healthy and effective local expressions of the body of Christ, I repeatedly run into the problem of satisfaction. Yes, you heard me: One of the biggest impediments to positive change in faith communities can be that they are perfectly satisfied exactly where they are. Even when exactly where they are undermines the call of our faith to share Good News and welcome new people into the Episcopal Branch of the Jesus Movement.

The Dissatisfaction Solution

In the mid 1970s, a group of Organizational Development practitioners (David Gleicher, Richard Beckhard and Katherine Dannemiller) came up with a logic statement that has transformed the way I understand change in the church. It helps us conceptually and practically understand the role of dissatisfaction in an organizational effort toward positive change. It looks like this:

$$C = D \times V \times F > R$$

Written out, it means: Change is made possible when D (Dissatisfaction with a current state) times V (Vision for a changed state) times F (First steps toward the vision) are greater than the natural and normal R (Resistance to change) in the system.

As in a mathematical equation, if either D or V or F are at zero, then they all come to zero. So, for example, if there is no vision, or no dissatisfaction with the current state, or no clear first steps, the movement toward change will not be able to overcome resistance. All three elements – including dissatisfaction – are necessary for positive change.

Most leaders are aware that in order for a change to happen we need a clear vision for the future and some concrete next steps to get us there. What can feel counterintuitive for us, especially as pastoral leaders, is the dissatisfaction factor. We are conditioned to see satisfaction, comfort and contentedness as positive outcomes. We want our people to be happy with us. As a result, we often end up bearing all the dissatisfaction for systemic change – a burden that's too much for one person and not always powerful enough to move the change forward.

Key to understanding this process is knowing that the D doesn't stand for "dissatisfaction with leadership" or "dissatisfaction with the priest." D is for dissatisfaction with the current state, whatever that state is. Properly understood, this logic statement can be used to strategize dissatisfaction in ways that help a faith community strive for and own a change on a systemic level, effectively managing and overcoming their own resistance to it.

Conversations help move the needle

In my first call, I used this model to strategize changing the announcements. Instead of just changing them, I started by getting a group of people together to walk through the way a newcomer would experience Sunday morning at our church. I asked them to imagine what it would be like to enter, be greeted and then sit through up to 20 minutes of open mic announcements before experiencing any prayer, liturgy, worship or formal welcome. My small group was horrified to discover that the practice they loved violated one of their core values – to be hospitable to everyone, especially those who are new.

Suddenly, and without my asserting any authority other than convening the conversation, they were ready for a vision and first steps toward changing this practice.

We worked together to generate these as well, moving announcements to one voice at the peace and adding written biddings to our Prayers of the People. Because the shift was framed positively, as a way to be welcoming to newcomers, most embraced it eagerly. Indeed, it was not long after

this change that we began to experience more visitors. And more of those who visited decide to stick around.

If you are a leader struggling to make a change, consider working through this simple logic statement and asking – is there a clear vision? Do we have concrete first steps to get us there? And finally, is my church too satisfied to change? If the answer to the last question is “yes” consider how you can start conversations that move the needle and use increased dissatisfaction to move your community toward positive change.

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Resources:

- [What Needs To Go Out, So The New Can Come In?](#) by Greg Syler, ECF Vital Practices blog, November 9, 2016
- [Change is Possible](#) by Richelle Thompson, ECF Vital Practices blog, December 2, 2016
- [Of Dinosaurs & Discernment](#) by Lisa H. Towle, Vestry Papers, March 2012

Shepherding Change

Adriane Bilous

Early this past June, clergy-lay teams from more than ten congregations in nine dioceses settled in at Kanuga Camp and Conference Center in Hendersonville, North Carolina, for a three-day educational intensive on stewardship, discipleship, adaptive leadership, parish finance and administration and more. They were participants in the Episcopal Church Foundation’s (ECF) Congregational Leadership Initiative (CLI), a year-long program in collaboration with the Church Pension Group (CPG), designed to provide resources, tools and other support to help congregations collaboratively address the leadership and financial challenges of congregational ministry in the 21st century. CLI is aimed at newer clergy (ordained in the past five years) and those in new positions as rector or priest-in-charge. Two lay leaders from the congregation complete each clergy leader’s team. CLI is part of ECF’s Lilly Endowment National Initiative to address the economic challenges facing pastoral leaders.

On the second evening of the Kanuga retreat, Kate Adams, ECF special projects director, moderated a panel called “Leading Change.” She asked panelists, representing both lay and clergy perspectives, to share their stories and discuss different types of change in their unique contexts.

Keep moving forward

Christine Galli was a member of the team from Christ Church, Detroit, where she’s the senior warden and leader of the church’s Detroit Reading Camp. Christ Church recently celebrated its 40th

anniversary and is no newcomer to change in the community. As many know, Detroit saw incredible community change in 2008, when the collapse of the area's auto industry left "Motor City" in peril. Christine noted that while Detroit is recovering, Christ Church's population no longer mirrors the population outside the church. With renewal, a new community has developed, leading to new opportunities for outreach to the congregation's neighbors.

As part of its CLI work, the Christ Church team is exploring the realities of what Detroit used to be, what it is becoming and what it will become in the future. Christine underscored their realization that to lead change, they couldn't just sit back and say, "we're good where we are." Christ Church's leaders, along with its members, have to re-imagine the church's role in the community and find their purpose once more.

Not too small to make a difference

The Rev. Rachael Pettengill-Rasure, rector at Church of Our Saviour, brought her leadership team from Milton, Massachusetts. Rachael explained to the audience that the church's current concerns were an over-reliance on the endowment and lay leader burnout. In response, the team has worked to shift the narrative from one of scarcity to one of abundance. Rachael explained that part of this shift includes an emphasis on gratitude for the energy, passion and people of the congregation, along with a mantra – If we believe we are too small to make a difference, then we are too small to make a difference.

These words quickly led to action as the congregation refocused on listening and opening up to change. The result? A program, "[Courageous Conversations towards Racial Justice](#)," designed to talk honestly and openly about race, racism and community bias. Offered in collaboration with the Milton Interfaith Clergy Association, the program has brought people from all over the larger community into their small parish. In fact, the first time they held the program at the church, thirty new people walked through its doors.

Remember who you are

Change has been challenging at Grace in the Plains in Virginia. Shane Pixton, a lay leader at Grace, explained that the past ten years have been one long transition, involving several major leadership replacements and the exodus of many members. She emphasized that throughout this decade, parishioners and Grace's leadership team have worked tirelessly to maintain their identity. For example, [Grace Church Woodchucks](#) coordinates parishioner teams from Grace and several multi-denominational congregations to cut and deliver firewood to local residents in need. That effort has been an important part of Grace Church's community service for the past 15 years. Grace is also known for its desire to support and maintain the artistic community. This winter, Grace's concert series will celebrate its 20th anniversary season, and the Shakespeare Opera Theatre will perform "Romeo and Juliet" at the church, as part of its fourth season. These vital ministries and relationships keep people focused and in community with one another through tough times.

Continue to be in relationship

Change takes various forms, and Kate asked panelists to detail the types of change they had experienced and how internal or external change have affected their congregations. The Rev. Morris Thompson III, rector at Church of the Mediator in Meridian, Mississippi, explained that much of the change affecting Mediator was external. Changes in the surrounding community have compelled church members to wrestle with the question: What does it mean to be a part of the neighborhood?

For decades, Mediator had been a well-known institution in the local community, one that let everyone know that it was serious about sharing God's unconditional love. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Rev. A.C. "Chip" Marble (who would become Bishop of Mississippi in a few years) established the congregation as a progressive bastion in the community. Mediator was one of the first LGBTQ supportive congregations in the area, and Chip worked closely with the local NAACP chapter.

Morris pointed out that as 2020 draws near, changes in the neighborhood make-up have led many to question the congregation's place in the community. He's convinced that when changes occur, big or small, the focus should remain on being in relationship with community members, rather than seeing the church's role as merely providing a commodity. Morris and the congregation's leadership team are determined to make sure that Mediator remains a place of welcome as things change, a place where kids love to congregate and play basketball and where parishioners live into their mission to be a welcoming and affirming community.

Conflict can seem endless, but shouldn't overwhelm

The Rev. Winston Arthur agreed with Morris. Changes in the surrounding community are affecting his parish, St. Michael and All Angels (SMAA), in Stone Mountain, Georgia, as well. The culture at SMAA had become very rigid, and tensions existed between groups, as only a few controlled the larger parish community. Those changes led this faith community to seek a return to old methods and ways of being church, methods and ways that mean a greater sharing of leadership, empowering more lay leaders and building strong ecumenical relationships.

In the panel discussion, Winston shared his insights on the presence of conflict during periods of change. He has significant experience as a lawyer and mediator, and emphasized that conflict is always present in some form or another. What is important, in his view, is how we respond to conflict. That's what separates successful outcomes from failed ones. Winston asked audience members to consider their interactions in situations involving parish conflict, how everyone must work to name the conflict and discuss the "whys" and "why nows" at those oft-stressful times.

He went on to explain that SMAA was dealing with generations of anxiety and fear around money and the parish's finances. Before beginning to tackle this well-established mode of thinking, he began a listening campaign with his parishioners. "Amazing things can happen when people are able to share and feel heard by church leaders," he said. Winston also highlighted, from his own experience, the power of a third party – an outsider who can act as mediator and facilitator for tough conversations. Together, these two tactics have begun to chip away at those ingrained worries and to rebuild trusting relationships at St. Michael's and All Angels.

Going off the map and feeling good

As panelists told their stories and answered questions from the audience, Kate asked them to share a specific moment when they felt they were “going off map” and their feelings around charting a new and unknown course. Christine Galli began by advising lay leaders to stay strong and prayerful. She said it’s important to the overall health and future of the parish to focus on maintaining programs during times of transition to keep souls fed.

Winston noted that anxiety can build up over generations and across relationships. He stressed the need to acknowledge the past and recognize that anxieties will not disappear overnight. Change takes time and sometimes occurs over generations.

Morris reminded us that the way individuals and groups perceive change can vary. Issues that we view together as a church might not be seen in the same way by others. Conversations need to include multiple perspectives and interpretations. He argued that a willingness to go the distance with things that people might not fully understand or agree with is an important aspect in keeping strong during times of change.

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Resources:

- [First Steps in Leading Change](#) an ECF webinar presented by Miguel Escobar and Brendon Hunter November 24, 2015
- [Good Transitions](#) by Hope Eakins, Vestry Papers, May 2018
- [Vision for Impact, Not Just Change](#) by Linda Buskirk, Vestry Papers, July 2014
- [Characteristics of Effective Congregational Leader](#) by Thomas P. Holland, Vestry Papers, June 2002

Why Budget?

Diane Jardine Bruce

Some of the most important work a congregation can do is to prepare the annual budget. A congregation without a budget is like a car without GPS – you can’t tell where you’ve been or where you are going. Preparing an annual budget is some of the most important work a congregation can do. When it’s approached to inform the congregation of the vital mission and ministry taking place, the budgeting process can indeed be reflective and spirit-filled.

Zero-based budgeting and narrative budgeting offer two approaches for developing a budget that is not only mission- and ministry-focused, but a way to re-imagine the work of the congregation as a work of the Holy Spirit. When woven together, the two processes are a powerful way to celebrate

what is going well and, at the same time, to move a congregation in the direction the Spirit is leading.

Zero-based budgeting + narrative budgeting = increased focus on mission and ministry

According to The Episcopal Church's *Manual of Business Methods in Church Affairs*, zero-based budgeting "is very time- and paperwork-intensive; it is not recommended annually but periodically (e.g., once every five years). Each program chair and/or staff member is asked to assume the program is new and has received no funding previously. This means that program groups must take an in-depth look at their programs and how their activities are conducted." (Chapter 1 section A). This is true, and it is why joining zero-based budgeting with narrative budgeting is an important undertaking for any congregation.

What comes first – the vision/mission statement or the budget?

I recommend that the congregation's leadership, with input from various ministry groups, develop a vision and/or mission statement to guide the work of the congregation. There has been much written about vision and mission statements, so I won't cover that here. Prayerfully developing a vision and/or mission statement is imperative to ensuring that as each group looks at its ministry area with fresh eyes, it is focused on where the congregation has discerned the Spirit is moving it.

How do you approach zero-based budgeting?

The goal of zero-based budgeting is to have each mission and ministry area look at its work and how it is contributing – or not – to the vision and mission of the congregation. Members of the congregation working in a particular ministry area come together, perhaps along with some new members who have fresh ideas and passion for this work, to pray, talk frankly about the ministry and to dream. In this process, nothing is "sacred". It is definitely *not* about "what we always do." It's a complete rebuilding of the work of the ministry area in light of the vision and mission of the congregation, including how the ministry is provided, who provides it and how much it will cost.

Included in this process is a reordering of expense categories by importance. Music and worship may have been high on the budget expense categories in prior years, but a burgeoning Sunday School and youth group may eclipse music and worship as the zero-based budgeting process comes together. It is indeed time-consuming, but doing this every few years allows a congregation to engage deeply in the work of finding where the Spirit is moving. It is akin to a new "startup" and is equally invigorating. Make sure you put the highest priority on what you give away – hard-dollar outreach in the form of diocesan assessments, as well as dollars given out in the community and the world are an important part of this process.

How do you approach narrative budgeting?

Narrative budgeting is the next step in the process – *telling the story* about where the Spirit is moving, and what the ministry group feels is its particular contribution to the mission and vision of the congregation. Put it into words. Use pictures, videos – anything that can share the story. This is the part of the process where creativity in the presentation of the work is paramount. Most

importantly, the narrative budget is the vehicle by which the Good News of this ministry is offered to the congregation. See if the message can be synthesized into one pithy line and let that be your motivation.

Remember – you are talking about mission and ministry. You are not talking about how much money you need to keep the lights and the AC on; you are talking about the lives that are changed, and the mission and ministry accomplished *because* you have the lights on.

While zero-based budgeting is done every few years, narrative budgeting can and should be done every year. New things happen in mission and ministry areas. Celebrate them. Share them. Tell the stories of the ways the vision and mission statements are being lived out in every area of the congregation. Turn the annual meeting into a joyous celebration of the year ahead!

Joining zero-based and narrative budgeting to focus on mission and ministry

Once the zero-based budget is produced together with the narrative portion, the building of actual budget numbers begins. Start by outlining the budget categories as you normally would: Income areas first, such as *Pledge, Plate, Endowment Income, Facilities Usage, Easter/Christmas Offerings*, etc. Next, plan out the Expenses as an expression of the Mission and Ministry areas discovered and fleshed out in the zero-based and narrative budgeting processes.

Arrange the expense categories by order of importance as defined during the zero-based and narrative budgeting processes. *Begin with how much you want to give away.* Yes, you read that right. Outreach – your diocesan assessment and then your hard dollar outreach monies. These are the first budget items and should be at the top of the expense area on your budget. Describe what those dollars help fund, both directly in your own outreach and indirectly, through the work of your diocese, The Episcopal Church and the worldwide Anglican Communion. When we are asking people to give generously to the church – to tithe – we must make what the church gives a priority in order to faithfully address the vision and mission of the congregation. In this way, the congregation is participating in God's economy.

Does it make human sense? No. But it does make God sense. Think about it. God gave us God's son – God gave us God's first fruits in the form of Jesus. We are asked to do the same – to give from our first fruits. Remember – everything we have, everything we do, everything we are is a gift from God, and it is a gift that is meant to be shared.

The pledge and plate income you receive is a reflection of your work on stewardship. If you are asking people to give of their first fruits to the church, then the church must do the same. Order the rest of the expense categories in descending order of importance to mission and ministry. Sometimes, some of the highest dollar amounts needed will be in a lower section of the budget. That's okay. If you determine your focus is on, say, Christian Education, it should still be listed after Outreach, and the budget numbers should make sense, given your Spirit-guided focus.

Conclusion

Budgeting should be a boost to the life and spirit of the congregation, not a dreaded task. When zero-based and narrative budgeting are knit together, the purpose and focus of the congregation becomes clear and people's excitement about making a difference in the community around them while feeding them spiritually is contagious. Don't dread it – do it!

*The Rt. Rev. **Diane M. Jardine Bruce** was consecrated the seventh bishop suffragan of the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles in 2009, after serving for 10 years as rector of St. Clement's by-the-Sea Church in San Clemente, California. The first woman to be elected bishop in diocesan history, Bishop Bruce's areas of specialization include multicultural ministries, stewardship and oversight of the congregations in the southern and northern areas of the Diocese, and in 2018, she was put in charge of Finance for the Diocese. Bishop Bruce speaks Spanish, Mandarin and some Cantonese as well as English. She holds a doctoral degree from Seabury-Western Seminary as well as a master of divinity degree from the Claremont School of Theology and a bachelor's degree in linguistics from the University of California at Berkeley. Prior to ordination she served Wells Fargo Bank as vice president, compensation management and analysis.*

Resources:

- [Mission-Based Budgeting: A Loving, Liberating, Life-Giving Practice](#) an ECF webinar presented by Phyllis Jones, March 13, 2019
- [Fearless Finances - Parish Budgets](#) an ECF webinar presented by Donald Romanik and Jerry Keucher, October 13, 2016
- [The Budget, aka The Other Half of Good Stewardship](#) by Anna Olson, ECF Vital Practices blog, November 21, 2017
- [L.E.A.D.E.R. — The Mission-Driven Budget](#) by Matthew Freeman, Vestry Papers, July 2009

Conflict and Change

Luisa Bonillas

When our monolingual, Spanish speaking daughter turned three, we decided to leave our English speaking Episcopal community in a suburb of Phoenix for a Spanish speaking Episcopal congregation in central Phoenix. We switched congregations because we felt that our daughter should have the same access to the liturgy we had experienced as monolingual, Spanish speaking young children in the 1970s. In August of 1999, we walked into Iglesia Episcopal de San Pablo in Phoenix, Arizona. It was a great reminder of our youth and something we wanted to share with our daughter. Before long, my monolingual, Spanish-speaking mother started attending church with us as well, and in the fall of 2000, our son was born, increasing our number on the 11-mile trek to San Pablo once more.

Stepping up to serve

When we joined San Pablo, we were quickly asked to take "What is an Episcopalian" classes, along with others who were asked to serve on a newly-rebuilt Bishop's Committee. Our priest-in-charge had arrived from Latin America the previous year, and he was working hard to continue growing

this community. San Pablo's is one of the oldest Spanish-speaking congregations in the United States with years of history. We all did the best we could in the small, dilapidated building that we had inherited.

A mission of the Diocese of Arizona, San Pablo dates back to 1930, when Archdeacon J. Rockwood Jenkins started a Spanish service to serve the largely Spanish speaking farmworker community in Phoenix's Alhambra section. When the Mexican community moved into the central area of Phoenix, San Pablo moved its building from the Alhambra community to a new, 7th Avenue location. By 2001, the building had become dilapidated, and efforts by the congregation's Bishop's Committee to work with the city of Phoenix and the Diocese to restore and bring it up to code had been unsuccessful.

Joining forces

In the spring of 2001, the priest-in-charge at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Phoenix, invited Iglesia Episcopal de San Pablo to visit its location, eight miles northeast of our 7th Avenue building. St. Paul's, an English-speaking congregation, had experienced great decline in membership and weekly Sunday attendance. The neighborhood around its property had changed from predominantly Anglo to a largely Latino community, and St. Paul's had not adjusted its offerings to welcome the changing community. For years, the church had seen its population decline and its members aging.

After the initial meeting, St. Paul's invited San Pablo to relocate and join them at their location. It was fortuitous, as San Pablo was currently holding its Spanish-only service in an old chapel style building that did not have air conditioning. With summers in Phoenix reaching 100 degrees by early morning, moving to a larger, air conditioned building was a wonderful opportunity. San Pablo's priest in charge and Bishop's Committee accepted their offer.

Change and conflict

When St. Paul's and San Pablo signed the agreement to share the property but remain two separate congregations, neither group realized how short-lived this arrangement would be. By June 2001, St. Paul's had closed its doors. The congregation had run out of money as more and more of its parishioners died or moved away, and it was no longer financially viable.

Because San Pablo was a mission, St. Paul's buildings and property reverted to the Diocese, and without consulting San Pablo, the Diocese made the decision to allow a charter school to take over St. Paul's main building. San Pablo's leadership had not anticipated St. Paul's closing, and they scrambled to make their unkempt property on 7th Avenue safe for their family-centered and growing congregation. New fencing, classroom flooring and updates to the bathrooms, parish hall and kitchen were needed.

These changes affected San Pablo's leadership. Tensions with St. Paul's leadership when San Pablo arrived combined with others arising from the Diocese's decision to bring a charter school into St. Paul's property and its failure to help update San Pablo's 7th Avenue property, led to opposing views among the congregation's leaders. The vicar and senior warden could not see eye to eye, and

the following fall, the senior warden and treasurer left San Pablo and moved to another congregation.

Change that needed to happen

My spouse was that senior warden and I was that treasurer. Leaving San Pablo was painful and spirit draining. We had a one-year old son, a five-year old, now bilingual daughter, and a monolingual, Spanish-speaking mother to consider in this move. Even after a one-on-one meeting with the bishop and a Bishop's Committee meeting with the bishop, we knew that staying was no longer an option. We needed a new spiritual home.

The leadership change at San Pablo was, however, exactly what needed to happen. One of the Bishop's Committee members stepped into the senior warden position, and a paid treasurer was brought in from another congregation. The great majority of the congregation, along with the other members of the Bishop's Committee, had emigrated from Mexico as adults. I was born in the United States and my spouse emigrated from Mexico as a child. We are both first-generation college graduates, and while we could have been a part of the San Pablo congregation long-term, it was really not our place to lead.

We have visited San Pablo periodically and we are friends with the now long-time lay leadership there. A new vicar joined the congregation several years ago and San Pablo continues to thrive as a Spanish-speaking mission of the Diocese.

Embracing change and moving on in faith

Sometimes you need to move out of the way to let others lead. It was a heart-wrenching decision for our family to leave San Pablo, but in the end it needed to be so. Our formation at San Pablo proved crucial to our understanding of the Episcopal Church and its leadership style. After serving on the Bishop's Committee and representing San Pablo at three Diocesan Conventions, we were more comfortable in the wider church.

The formation we received at San Pablo was life-changing for us, because it has allowed us to be active in the church for many years. We continue to embrace change as leaders in our church community. New rectors and new congregations help us to learn more about ourselves and the people we serve.

San Pablo continues to flourish in membership and programming. They enjoy a very successful couples' prayer group ministry. Our family has thrived in The Episcopal Church as well, thanks to what we learned and lived in San Pablo. Between the four members of our family, we have served on Standing Committees, Diocesan Councils, Standing Commissions and Task Forces, as a General Convention Official Youth Presence, General Convention Deputy and on Episcopal Youth Event Planning Teams. It has been an honor and a privilege to represent the Latinx community in these leadership opportunities, and we are grateful for the time at San Pablo that started us in this journey of faith.

Luisa Bonillas, PhD has been an Episcopalian for 23 years. She has worked for a mission, parish, cathedral, and diocese in the past. She currently does contract work for Latino/Hispanic Ministries and lives in Arizona with her spouse.

Resources:

- [Multisites Growing...Just Not in the Episcopal Church](#) by Greg Syler, ECF Vital Practices blog, October 21, 2019
- [Treat the Disease, Not the Symptom](#) by Jerry Keucher, Vestry Papers, March 2016
- [First Steps in Understanding Church Conflict](#) an ECF webinar presented by Christy Shain-Hendricks, March 9, 2017

Conflicto y cambio

Luisa Bonillas

Cuando nuestra hija que solo hablaba español cumplió tres años de edad, decidimos dejar nuestra comunidad episcopal anglohablante en un suburbio de Phoenix por una feligresía episcopal hispanohablante en el centro de Phoenix. Cambiamos de feligresía porque nos pareció que nuestra hija debería tener acceso a la misma liturgia que habíamos tenido en la década de los 1970, cuando éramos niños pequeños que solo hablábamos español. En agosto de 1999 entramos a la Iglesia Episcopal de San Pablo en Phoenix, Arizona. Fue un gran recordatorio de nuestra juventud y algo que deseábamos compartir con nuestra hija. Al poco tiempo, mi madre hispanohablante monolingüe empezó a asistir a la iglesia con nosotros y con el nacimiento de nuestro hijo en el otoño de 2000, nuestro viaje de 11 millas hasta San Pablo ahora tenía un miembro más.

Comenzar a servir

Cuando nos unimos a San Pablo, casi inmediatamente se nos pidió que tomáramos clases sobre “¿Qué es una persona episcopal?” con otras personas a quienes se les estaban pidiendo que sirvieran un Comité del Obispo/Misionero recientemente reconstruido. Nuestro sacerdote a cargo había llegado de Latinoamérica el año anterior y había estado trabajando arduamente para seguir expandiendo esa comunidad. San Pablo es una de las feligresías hispanohablantes más antiguas de Estados Unidos con mucha historia. Tratamos lo mejor que pudimos en el pequeño edificio dilapidado que habíamos heredado.

San Pablo, una misión of the Diócesis de Arizona, empezó en 1930, cuando el archidiácono J. Rockwood Jenkins inició un servicio religioso en español para atender a la comunidad de agricultores principalmente hispana de Alhambra en Phoenix. Cuando la comunidad Mexicana se mudó al área central de Phoenix, San Pablo trasladó su ubicación de Alhambra a su nueva dirección en la 7ª Avenida. En 2001, ese edificio estaba dilapidado y los esfuerzos del Comité del Obispo/Misionero de San Pablo con el gobierno de Phoenix y de la Diócesis para repararlo y reformarlo para que cumpliera con los reglamentos no tuvieron éxito.

Unir fuerzas

En la primavera de 2001, el sacerdote a cargo de St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Phoenix, invitó a la Iglesia Episcopal de San Pablo que visitara su ubicación, a ocho millas al noroeste de nuestro edificio en la 7ª Avenida. St. Paul's, una feligresía anglohablante, tenía muchos menos miembros y cada vez menos gente asistía los domingos. El barrio alrededor de su propiedad había cambiado de ser predominantemente anglo a ser una comunidad latina, y St. Paul's no se había adaptado para darle la bienvenida a la comunidad cambiante. Por años, la iglesia había presenciado a su población reducirse y envejecer.

Después de la reunión original, St. Paul's invitó a San Pablo a que se le uniera en su ubicación. Fue fortuito porque San Pablo había tenido sus servicios religiosos únicamente en español en un viejo edificio estilo capilla que no tenía aire acondicionado. Con los veranos de Phoenix alcanzando los 100°F temprano por la mañana, mudarse a un edificio más grande y con aire acondicionado era una oportunidad maravillosa. El edificio de St. Paul's estaba situado a ocho millas al noreste de San Pablo. El sacerdote a cargo de San Pablo y el Comité del Obispo/Misionero aceptaron su oferta.

Cambio y conflicto

Cuando St. Paul's y San Pablo firmaron su acuerdo para compartir una propiedad, pero continuar como dos feligresías diferentes, ninguno de los grupos había previsto lo poco que duraría ese arreglo. En junio de 2001, St. Paul's cerró sus puertas. A la feligresía se le había estado acabando el dinero a medida que más y más de sus feligreses fallecían o se mudaban a otro sitio, y había dejado de ser económicamente viable.

Debido a que San Pablo era una misión de la diócesis, los edificios y propiedades St. Paul's fueron devueltos a la diócesis, y sin consultar a San Pablo, la Diócesis decidió permitir que una escuela chárter pasara a ocupar el edificio principal. El liderazgo de San Pablo no había anticipado que se cerraría St. Paul's, y trató de hacer los cambios requeridos en la propiedad desatendida en la 7ª Avenida para la seguridad de una feligresía centrada en familias y en expansión. La propiedad necesitaba un nuevo cerco, pisos para los nuevos salones de clase y actualización de los baños, el salón parroquial y la cocina.

Estos cambios afectaron el liderazgo de San Pablo. Las tensiones con el liderazgo de St. Paul cuando llegó San Pablo combinada con otras tensiones que surgieron de la decisión de la Diócesis de traer la escuela a la propiedad de St. Paul's y no ayudar a actualizar la propiedad de San Pablo en la 7ª Avenida, llevó a opiniones opuestas entre los líderes de la congregación. El vicario y el guardián mayor no coincidían en sus puntos de vista, y el otoño siguiente, el guardián mayor y la tesorera se fueron de San Pablo para irse a otra congregación.

El cambio que tenía que pasar

Mi esposo era el guardián mayor y yo la tesorera. Irnos de San Pablo fue doloroso y espiritualmente agotador. Teníamos un hijo de un año, una hija bilingüe de cinco años y una madre que solo hablaba español para tener en consideración en esa mudanza. Incluso después de una reunión personal con el obispo y de una reunión del Comité con el obispo, permanecer dejó de ser una opción. Necesitábamos un nuevo hogar espiritual.

El cambio de liderazgo que ocurrió en San Pablo era exactamente lo que era necesario que ocurriera. Una persona del Comité entró en el puesto de guardián mayor y contrataron a un tesorero de otra congregación. La gran mayoría de la congregación, junto con los otros miembros del Comité, había emigrado de México como adultos. Yo nací en los Estados Unidos y mi esposo emigró de México cuando era niño. Ambos somos los primeros graduados universitarios de nuestra familia y si bien hubiéramos podido ser parte de la feligresía de San Pablo, a largo plazo no era realmente nuestro sitio para liderar.

Hemos visitado San Pablo periódicamente y somos amigos del liderazgo laico que ha estado allí desde hace mucho tiempo. Un nuevo vicario se había unido a la feligresía hacía varios años y San Pablo sigue prosperando como una misión hispanohablante de la diócesis.

Aceptando el cambio y avanzando en la fe

A veces es necesario hacerse a un lado para abrirles el paso a otros líderes. La decisión de irnos de San Pablo fue desgarradora para nuestra familia, pero al final tenía que ser así. Nuestra formación en San Pablo resultó esencial para nuestro entendimiento de la Iglesia Episcopal y su estilo de liderazgo. Después de servir en el Comité del Obispo/Misionero y representar a San Pablo en tres Convenciones Diocesanas, nos sentimos más cómodos en la iglesia en general.

La formación que recibimos en San Pablo nos cambió la vida, porque nos ha permitido estar activos en la iglesia durante muchos años. Continuamos aceptando el cambio como líderes en nuestra comunidad. Nuevos rectores y nuevas congregaciones nos ayudan a aprender más sobre nosotros mismos y las personas a las que servimos.

San Pablo continúa floreciendo en membresía y programación. Disfrutan de un exitoso ministerio grupal de oración para parejas. Nuestra familia también ha prosperado en la Iglesia Episcopal, gracias a lo que aprendimos y vivimos en San Pablo. Entre los cuatro miembros de nuestra familia, hemos servido en Comités Permanentes, Consejos Diocesanos, Comisiones Permanentes y Grupos de Trabajo, como Presencia Oficial Juvenil de la Convención General, Diputados de la Convención General y en Equipos de Planificación del Evento de Jóvenes Episcopales. Ha sido un honor y un privilegio representar a la comunidad latina en estas oportunidades de liderazgo, y estamos agradecidos por el tiempo en San Pablo que nos inició en este viaje de fe.

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Recursos:

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- [Transiciones Fieles-- Disponibilidad](#) por Rosa Lindahl Mallow, ECF Vital Practices blog, 5 noviembre, 2013
- [Primeros pasos para liderar cambios](#) un webinar de ECF presentado por Sandra Montes y Juan Angel Monge, 19 abril 2016