The Multigenerational Congregation by Gil Rendle  Alban Institute Press

Notes compiled by Diane E. Shallue

Issues in Bimodal congregations (pp. 46-49)

1. Values are not easily negotiated.
2. The dominant value systems in most established congregations are defined by the GI and Boomer generations.
3. Our congregations are shaped for discomfort.
4. The bimodal congregation is evidence of denominational growth and congregational relevance.
5. Dynanics of a bimodal congregation- Two issues – age and tenure

“A primary lesson of working with a bimodal congregation is the high correlations between age and tenure of membership. But tenure – the length of one’s membership or participation – is the more dominate factor that will determine a member’s behavior in that congregation.” P. 103

Leadership skills

1. Identify and help others see the basic themes and patterns of tenured behavior normed by generational values. (p. 106)
2. To realize that everyone wants it their way – no matter their tenure or generational cohort. The consumer values of individualism and instant gratification affect everyone. (p. 108)
3. To be thoughtful and make the effort not to get caught up into the generational blaming game (p. 111)

What can leaders do in these bimodal congregations?

Moving to the balcony: Rather than doing something about our differences or solving the problem of difference, help people to learn about the differences.

- Move to an emotional place where learning and reflection are possible (p. 119) – Find time to step away from the daily work to reflect and see the big picture. Moving to the balcony. Read op 120 bottom for practical way to help congregation.
- For meeting, tell people that for 20-30 minutes they will be asked to learning something about all congregations and then asked to talk about how the new learning helps them to understand their own congregation.
- Organize leadership retreats
- Have the leaders read and discuss a book.
- Leader’s responsibility is to introduce balcony work and to lead others into the balcony space. It is not the leader’s job to determine what others will learn.

Working descriptively

- Clarify the difference between describing something and evaluating. Evaluation is perceived as a threat.
- Working carefully to be descriptive
• Model descriptive behavior for others.
• See example of the difference on pages 122-123.
• Do not diagnosis a problem
• Work to understand the context, the system “We have a natural tendency to blame people rather than trying to understand the system or the context that might underlie the behavior.” (p. 125)
• Help members learn about differences and negotiate their differences rather than blaming and battling over them.

Seeking common space

• Don’t look for right or wrong
• Don’t look for solutions for problems
• Work to build community
• Search for common space
• New things happen on the edge not among those who live in the center of the cultural value system
• “if the pastor falls into the trap of responding to these central people with attempts to ‘fix’ the discomfort associate d with the ‘new thing’ happening at the edge, the result is continued competition.” (p. 129 bottom)
• “People living at the edge of their value system are sensitive to differences and willingly learn more about them. Leaders need to help the edge people find common space and encourage them to shape their own agenda, one related to experiments in developing new congregational practices.” (P. 130)
• See bottom of page 130 about how to change the agenda.
• Leaders need to identify edge people and bring them together.

Installing civility

• Culture of individualism tends toward incivility.
• A sense of sacrifice is needed: generosity when there is a cost and trust when there is a risk. (p. 132)
• Civil behavior does not come naturally.
• Leaders need to set the standard for civility.
• “Leaders need to remain poised, listen carefully and behave civilly in response to the demands of others.” (p. 133)
• Leaders listen to discomfort.
• Leaders help members remain in their discomfort in a place of learning and community.
• Leaders help members open themselves to the movement of God in new ways in their midst.

(summarized by Diane Shallue – June 2015)