

IN THE INTERIM

She said, “We cannot do it this way because we have *always* done it this way.” I was surprised but did not say anything. For, it was classic old church thinking and I expected more.

Many churches today are dying or decreasing in numbers. The former church that I served had 200 on a Sunday but they complained that they no longer had a fuller house for their later service. The church before that had 300 on a Sunday but complained that they used to have more in their regular service; only the same 35 in their earlier service.

The Next Gen and the Nones are not coming to church, even criticizing it, for having been hijacked by the so-called Evangelical Christians, now neither evangelical nor Christian. Some find other things to do or make excuses. For example, an acquaintance of mine even told me he needed to read *The New York Times* on Sunday mornings. Believe me, I understand that there *are* legitimate reasons that we sometimes have to be absent.

The notion, however, that we cannot do it any other way because we have always done it this way sounds a death knell. The world, culture and churches are in a period of exploration and innovation—looking for ways to meet the demands of a changing world, employing technology to help us be faster and smarter, and networking with each other in order to promote global understanding and outreach. Churches have ministries that are tech savvy in order to cut down on labor, time and stress and to reach out.

I remember the time when the answering machine and computer came into common

use. For me the ability to write my services and move paragraphs, to spell-check and send out documents at the press of a button seemed revolutionary. For example, one summer I had been invited to lead an international worship service in Hamburg, Germany, but the hosts needed the order of service “yesterday.” I recall finishing it then sending it almost immediately, avoiding folding the document, placing it in an envelope, driving to the post office to weigh in order to add the proper stamps – then waiting one week or more to see if, yes, they received it.

Church consultants tell us that if we are not adapting and improving, we are dying. For, churches pass through at least four legitimate “m” stages: *movement, mission, museum and mausoleum*. The Early Christians, Pilgrims and Puritans were an exciting movement when diverse men and woman gathered in house-churches and later moved outside. They became missionaries, formed churches, took over older preexisting structures then later constructed their own landmarks to God.

But they faltered, spiritually, when they forgot to listen to God and continue to adjust their movement and mission *for Christ*, and began to think of themselves as a museum. In other words, “this is how we have always been so this is how we should remain” in worship, running the office and programming. They failed to innovate and serve their communities. They ceased to use God’s gifts to their fullest and transform themselves into the church of the 21st century. Sadly, these churches are going into hospice care and becoming mausoleums.

I am trying, with God’s and your help, to creatively transition this congregation from somewhere between museum and mission to

mission. Let us be about prayerfully listening for and discerning together God's vision. I believe that this means welcoming diverse people, young and old, offering programs that are open to all, not just ourselves, and in whatever we do reaching out to our friends, neighbors with the excitement that *Christ is risen; he is risen indeed!* Please help.

Grace and peace,

Pastor Dianne