



The Ten “R”s for Plotting a New Congregational Course

Radical Transitions and Changes When Congregations Fully Surrender to God’s Empowering Vision

Every congregation that is started, planted, launched, or otherwise initiated as a Christ-centered, faith-based missional community reaches a point in its life when they need to **Re-envision**, **Revitalize** or **Renew** their journey. No congregations have straight-line, unending quantitative and qualitative growth. The founding dream or vision of congregations at some point—often 18 to 21 years after they are started—waned and congregations need to once again seek God’s empowering vision for their spiritual and strategic journey.

Some congregations are able to fully surrender to God’s empowering vision and they **Re-envision**, **Revitalize**, or **Renew** their journey. The wisest congregations realize they must do this every seven years after the initial, founding vision from God wanes. Research suggests that only about 20 percent of all congregations surrender to God’s empowering vision after their founding vision wanes.

There are also some congregations who do not live into their founding vision for a full 18 to 21 years as they experience some type of arrested development that stops their qualitative and quantitative growth. They need to **Re-envision**, **Revitalize**, or **Renew** their journey earlier than other congregations.

Too many congregations—perhaps 60 to 80 percent—have a difficult time engaging in a process to **Re-envision**, **Revitalize**, or **Renew**. They may experience short-term fixes that help them at best for 18 to 36 months. But they do not experience long-term solutions that last seven years or more. They simply move from fix to fix, growing weaker each time rather than stronger.

These congregations may hold on to ideas such as,

- “If we try hard enough then tomorrow will bring a return of yesterday.”
- “If we just had the right pastor we would grow again.”
- “This is our church, so the future programs and ministries must fit our image of church.”
- “If we could just reach young adults with children, we would be all right.”
- “Change is dangerous because it may cause us to do things that do not honor God.”
- “God would never ask us to do things that take us away from our traditions.”
- “Contemporary worship is not really worship. It is more a party or band concert.”

Congregations unable to **Re-envision**, **Revitalize**, or **Renew** are composed of persons of worth created in the image of God. These are wonderful people. They are simply having a hard time accepting the fact that they have reached a time when they must consider radical transitions and changes that seem awkward, unfamiliar, and scary. Without doing this their church may ultimately die.

One strategy in our association—*Transforming Congregations*—is about helping congregations who have been in significant decline over many years to turnaround and once again be vital and vibrant congregations. At times this requires radical transitions and changes.

The current version of this approach is **The Ten “R”s for Plotting a New Congregational Course**. Our goal is to share these ten “R”s with congregational leaders, dialogue with them, and pray with them. We desire to come alongside congregations to help them explore their choices, help them discern what it is that God wants them to do, develop a strategy to move forward, and take necessary actions to fully surrender to God’s empowering vision for them.

Here are the ten “R”s. This week and next week more detailed explanations of these choices will post.

First, is **Replication**. This is when a congregation launches multiple congregational campuses. Often seen as something large congregations do, we have an example of a church in our association that has less than 50 in attendance that has launched another congregational campus that holds great promise for them.

Second, is **Reproduction**. This is when a congregation plants one or more new congregational expressions. Planting new congregational expressions as a new ongoing church is a strange idea for some congregations, but one that is more possible than they realize. New congregations can even be planted within the facilities of the current congregation.

Third, is **Relocation**. This is when a congregation moves to a more promising location. Communities change. At times congregations could be more vital and vibrant in a different location. Selling and moving away from their current location is a hard decision to make.

Fourth, is **Reception**. This is when a congregation becomes a location partner with other congregations and meet in the same place. Radical hospitality is required to share congregational facilities with one or more congregations—particularly when your congregation feels ownership of the facilities.

Fifth, is **Redemption**. This is when a congregation's viable and vibrant future involves joining with another congregation which has greater potential. In this choice a congregation aligns with a larger congregation with greater resources and allows them to guide the future for the congregation.

Sixth, is **Reconciliation**. This is when three or more congregations merge into a new congregation that expresses their unity in Christ. When two congregations merge this is **Redemption**. When three or more congregations merge this is the creation of a new congregation that creates a greater synergy than present in the three congregations individually.

Seventh, is **Redirection**. This is when a congregation significantly changes the focus of the congregation. It begins with a "clean sheet of paper" and reinvents the congregation as if they were starting over. **Redirection** happens when a congregation willingly does this without giving authority over to an outside leader. This takes great courage, spiritual direction, and radical action.

*Eighth, is **Reinvention**. This is when an existing congregation rethinks everything it does—like an extreme makeover—and restarts as a new congregation. The key here is that it realizes it cannot do it without giving authority over to an outside leader to make the changes. Making the transitions and changes themselves is too painful of a process without outside assistance.*

*Ninth, is **Resurrection**. This is when a congregation chooses to start all over again and replant itself as a new congregation. It intentionally dies. It stops meeting for worship, discipleship, fellowship, and mission. Then it allows a sponsoring congregation and a new pastor to come in and start a new congregation in their facilities, while providing basic worship, fellowship, and care for the remnant congregation.*

*Tenth, when a congregation ceases to exist for any reason it can experience **Release** where it creates a legacy to endow new congregational expressions with the assets it leaves behind. Every congregation ought to have a legacy plan just as every individual ought to have a savings account and a will.*

Each of these at some point may involve a **Rebranding and Relaunching** of the congregation. **Rebranding and Relaunching** is a tactic that may fit many of these choices for congregations but must also fit into a long-term strategy.

Beginning Monday, April 30th and running for ten weekdays, George Bullard is writing about each of these transitions and changes in his blog on the CMBA web site at [***George Bullard's Journey***](#).