Here Come the Apprentices: Renewal While Helping your Meeting/ Church Connect with its Community
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Five Stops on our Renewal Journey (this is a mobile process):

1. Identify: Who Are the Apprentices: Who is co-leading the way?
2. Identify: Where are we? (Context)
3. Identify: Who are we? Who are we taking with us? What is our center? (Tradition)
4. Identify: Where are we going? What are we called to do? (Renewal)
5. Identify: Next steps - Setting out with intention

Terms:
- Apprentices - Those who are a part of the tradition, who seek to be shaped and formed by it, and are self-aware enough of their own place in that tradition that they want to help carry the tradition forward into the future.
- Tradition - The living faith of the dead, the cloud of witnesses, the living thread(s) thread that we continue to carry with us that our ancestors (spiritual and biological) have passed onto us.
- Context - The geographical, socio-political, theological, economic, religious and the natural (Earthy) places our community finds themselves within and surrounded by.
- Renewal - Apprentices putting their tradition and context into conversation / dialogue with one another within their communities.
- Outreach - Sharing love and justice in the world as God's hands and feet. Outreach is the co-laboring with God in being care-takers of the world (human and more-than-human). I love Parker Palmer's version of this:

"The mission of the church is not to enlarge its membership, not to bring outsiders to accept its terms, but simply to love the world in every possible way—to love the world as God did and does."

Outline:

1. Who are the Apprentices:

Apprentices - Those who are a part of the tradition, who seek to be shaped and formed by it, and are self-aware enough that they want to help carry the tradition forward into the future.

A Faithful betrayal from Peter Rollins:

> There was once an old wise master who was at the end of his life. He had one apprentice he was deeply fond of but was worried that this apprentice was still far from enlightenment. The apprentice was deeply devoted to the master, carefully following all of his teachings and never deviating from the path laid out. This was what troubled the master most of all. Calling his apprentice to eat with him privately, he began,

> "You have been a thoughtful and dedicated follower of my teachings for many years, and you may well one day become a great teacher. However, I sense that you are in danger of betraying me in your thoughts and actions."

> This apprentice was crushed at the suggestion and responded, "… I never tire of engaging in the rituals and prayers that you have taught. I swear to you that I would never betray you, my great teacher." The master responded, "The fact that you have never betrayed my teachings, and the
> fact that you swear never to betray them: this is to betray them already."

Apprentices: Finding those who are healthy in the community and taking responsibility for their own health and the health of others.

> Edwin Friedman: A group of clergy came to me from one of the major religious denominations and said, "We are about to start a project that will raise fifty million dollars for our five hundred most troubled ministers. How would you spend it?" I responded, "Why would you put the fifty million into your five hundred most troubled? You will advance your denomination and our society far more if you put it into your five hundred best." They

answered, "But we could never raise the money for that." A Failure of Nerve by Edwin Friedman, P. 80

2. Where are we? Mapping Context

"We are not going to struggle to save places we don't love, we can't love places we don't know, and we'll never know places we haven't learned." -Babbo Duens

Context:

- The life story of the meeting and the individuals in the meeting. Successes and failures, key relationships, major losses.
- Major cultural systems that impact your context: language, sacred and secular cultures, systems of oppression, racism, imperialism, capitalism, patriarchy. What are the impacts of these systems, cultures, on your context?
- A personal or community's social location: Here we are talking about gender and race, class, education, ability, etc.
- Major changes that have taken place in your community
- The natural world context and the impact on land, soil, water, animals, etc.
- Micro-local-contexts: neighborhoods, schools, meeting/church, the river that runs through your town, local businesses, the impact of a certain family or person on a community, etc.

3. Who are we? Who are we taking with us? What is our center? (Tradition)

Jarolslav Pelikan:
> "Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. And, I suppose I should add, it is traditionalism that gives tradition such a bad name."

Robert Barclay:
> Robert Barclay writes in the Apology about this same idea when thinking about the Bible: "God hath seen meet that herein we should, as in a looking-glass, see the conditions and experience of the saints of old; that finding our experience answer to

theirs, we might thereby be the more confirmed and comforted, and our hope of attaining the same end strengthened."

Rabbi Abraham Heschel:
> It is customary to blame secular science and anti-religious philosophy for the eclipse of religion in modern society. It would be more honest to blame religion for its own defeats. Religion declined not because it was refuted, but because it became irrelevant, dull, oppressive, insipid. When faith is completely replaced by creed, worship by discipline, love by habit; when the crisis of today is ignored because of the splendor of the past; when faith becomes an heirloom rather than a living fountain; when religion speaks only in the name of authority rather than with the voice of compassion--its message becomes meaningless."

John Caputo:
> Derrida would say that genuine tradition is not constituted by any position or positivity but by a deeper affirmation. The task is not to reproduce literally what Jesus said and did - I have never ever seen an olive garden or a fig tree - but to repeat the love with which he said and did them, on the bet that those are the practices in which he would recognize himself today.

Alasdair MacIntyre:
> "What I am, therefore, is in key part what I inherit, a specific past that is present to some degree in my present. I find myself part of a history and that is generally to say...one of the bearers of tradition."

On Appreciative Inquiry:

Mark Lau Branson:
> Appreciative inquiry (AI) assumes that all organizations have significant life forces, and these forces are available in stories and imaginations. Further, by bringing these resources into the organization's conversations and planning, major changes can be implemented. In other words, by discovering the best and most valuable narratives and qualities of an organization, participants can construct a new way that has the most important links to the past and the most hopeful images of the future.

Appreciative Inquiry Process

- Choose the positive as the focus of inquiry.
- Inquire into stories of life-giving forces through well-crafted questions.
- Locate themes that appear in the stories and select topics for further inquiry.
- Create shared images for a preferred future.
- Find innovative ways to create that future

Sample of questions used in Appreciative Inquiry:

1. Describe a time in your organization/community that you considered a high-point experience, a time when you were most engaged and felt alive and vibrant. (What is)

2. Without being modest, what do you most value about yourself, your work, and your organization/community? (What is)

3. What are the core factors that give life to your organization/community when it is at its best? (What might be)

4. Imagine your organization/community ten years from now, when everything is just as you always wished it could be. What is different? How have you contributed to this "dream organization/community?" (What should be)

Want to know more? Read: Ten Assumptions of Appreciative Inquiry: https://bit.ly/3z3WHyK

4. Identify: Where are we going? What are we called to do? (Renewal)

Christianity for the Rest of Us: How the Neighborhood Church is Transforming the Faith (2006). Diana Butler Bass's characteristics of a thriving congregation "Signposts of Renewal:" Hospitality, Discernment, Healing, Contemplation, Testimony, Diversity, Justice, Worship, Reflection, and Beauty.

Experiment with Practices (here are some Practices inspired by Radical Christian traditions, Quakerism, and FWCC-Specific works):

- Expectant waiting worship (Silence)
- Communal discernment
- Non-violent resistance to the powers that be
- Living lives of plainness
- Eating together
- Singing songs (of resistance) together
- Praying together (joys and concerns)
- Friendship with our surrounding community
- Reading the Bible (in anti-imperial terms)
- Our concept of "communion" and communing with the marginalized in their ways
- Confession of our complicity in empire
- Creating space for sharing of the ways in which we have been traumatized by empire
- Practicing humility rather than Quaker exceptionalism
- Deep generosity of space, resources, money, and time to those who lack resources
- Undertaking and participate in healing work for ourselves and others
- Training members in the way of Friends. Going deep into the roots of our tradition and its practices and theology of resistance
- Learning and practicing anti-oppression work (resisting racism, classism, transphobia, ableism, etc) from a lens of love and redemption

Characteristics of Convergent Renewal

Commits to a "convergent mindset" - both tradition, contextual, and inclusive in terms of practice, dialogue, etc. Cultivating pride in its historical (denominational) past, but making clear moves to foster a spirit of creativity and remix.

Creates what it wants to see in the world - it is becoming a creative, generative community. Makes things happen unique to their context, addressing needs and issues in relevant and meaningful ways. Nurtures a participatory community - leadership fosters ownership and responsibility of the whole community, a

deep sense of belonging through shared leadership, participatory worship, fun, & fellowship.

Nurtures apprentices - Strong religious education, opportunities for learning, practical skill-building as a means of building shared leadership and ownership. Spiritually enriching, creates "disciples." Fosters a place of spiritual growth and impact. Power is shared inter-generationally. The older generations do not dominate or hold onto power too long and instead support mentoring. The younger generations seek to learn the wisdom of the tradition before challenging and changing it.

Loves their place (and embeds in their context): They understand their context. They love their place and are able to identify the gifts and movements of God in that place and the places of injustice and brokenness. They know the needs of their community and see to address them as they are able and led.

Fosters a "many voiced" community through diversity, inclusion, resisting the hyper individualism of capitalist culture. A community committed to God's will and the "sense of the meeting."

Engages in outreach, connects with concerns of local community, rejects Christian and/or Quaker exceptionalism and partners with communities to make life better for all. Serving as a launching pad for spiritually motivated social action. Reaching out to other groups locally and in wider geographical areas.

Experiences renewed spiritual depth - God's presence is known and felt throughout the community. There is a shared sense of mission and togetherness, without losing the individual. The community feels connected to one another but independent. They is a sense of spiritual renewal and a compelling within the community that speaks for itself. Gathered meetings are not unusual in this context. There is a deepening of worship, prayer, study and reflection, communal discernment, and the sharing of resources with one another and the broader community. A vulnerability and humility permeate the community and allowing a depth often hard to come by. Even those not in the meeting/church take note of the change.

Next Steps - Setting an Intention for Where You'd Like to Start:

Four Key Aspects to Understanding Renewal in Faith Communities
C. Wess Daniels
From https://bit.ly/3JKq2TZ

"Kindness eases change
Love quiets fear"
— Octavia E. Butler

In a lot of my classes and work at Guilford College, I talk about
renewal. I think that much of my work is focused around renewal,
not because of a failure in the institution but because change is
constant, change is inevitable, and with each new shift in
leadership, change can be dramatic. These shifts unfold within
the larger community and political systems in coordinated and
inevitable. Therefore, some intentional approach to renewal is
needed and necessary.

Without renewal we get stuck in the past.

Without renewal we devalue all that has been done before us.
We need someways of approach change-work that helps us hold these
various pieces of the puzzle together.

Plenty of books have been written on the subject, including my
own, which most readers of this blog are familiar with. A few
other books that have been instructive to me in the past are:
Managing Transitions by William and Susan; A Failure of Nerve by
Edwin Friedman; and Originals by Adam Grant.

Regardless of what you draw on when you are working within a
community, large or small, you will draw on something. We all
have our own desires, ethics, and biases. If we're not paying
attention and being intentional with what we do and how we
approach this work, it is very possible that we can do more harm
than good. Secondly, while it is important to be aware of the
things we bring to this work, it is equally important to know
what the communities we are in or are working with bring. What
are their own contexts, histories, biases, successes and
failures? How will all of this play into the final mix?

I believe that a strong framework around renewal can help our organizations move forward through change and transition without losing their identities.

This is not easy work, nor is it something that will make everyone happy, but there is a path that can be followed if the goal is to honor the tradition and identity of the organization, while also making sense of new questions, data, and contexts. In order to do this though, you will need leadership that is strong and able to stand on their own two feet, remain focused and direct, while also caring and kind.

"Kindness eases change
Love quiets fear"
— Octavia E. Butler

For the past four years, I have taught a class on the renewal of the Quaker tradition. I've been researching and writing on it since at least 2003, leading small groups, Sunday school lessons, and speaking on this subject to whoever will listen. I am passionate about it because I am curious about it. I am still very much learning what it means to bring renewal and how one goes about doing such a thing. But even the sheer bafflement of this exercise drives me. Recently, however, a more simple question struck me. When I talk about renewal what do I mean? Could I break it down? Could I describe it in an elevator? Is there a picture that describes this in a few words?

I thought I'd try here for you and I'd welcome your feedback below if you care to offer it.

Let me start with an image.

Are you familiar with a nurse log?

A nurse log is a tree that has fallen in the forest and other organisms over time begin to grow on it, using the fallen log as nutrients and a base to be grounded in. I became familiar with the nurse log living in the Pacific Northwest, it is something fairly common to see there. Renewal is a lot like this "nurse log." Renewal draws on the nutrients of the older material, the history, the tradition of that community or organization, allowing new growth to emerge, both are locked together but both

are differentiated. It is clear that the new growth is actually new, often different plants and species, but that it's absolutely connected to and dependent upon what the nutrients of the fallen logs. The nurse log is a beautiful image of what it looks like to say "Tradition is the ground of innovation."

In human society and community, we don't always get to this kind of nuanced picture. We like our traditionalism. We want it the way it was and we don't want it to change. If it changes, it is wrong, it is failing, it is unfaithful. Or we like our innovations and dramatic change. Traditions are old, not worth our time and patience. Too slow for the time we're in. But to strike some balance, to hold both tradition and change together is essential, even if it is very difficulty. Brent Bill put his finger on this recently when wrote about when he wrote about Retirement, Remixing, and the Religious Society of Friends.

Building on this image of the nurse long, I see four critical parts to renewal in communities and organizations that I'd like to outline here:

Appreciating and Drawing on Tradition

There are many ways to do this: Learning and respecting the past. Honoring those who went before you in how you talk about them but also how you differentiate from them. Taking time to listen to the constituents and incorporate their feedback. Work to become a true member of the community. I like to use the social change approach called "appreciative inquiry" because at the heart of this approach is a desire for drawing on the "life-giving forces" of that particular community. I do not know of a better place to start when it comes to thinking about change.

Recontextualing the organization for new questions, new incoming data, new constituencies

Renewal work is about taking into account the new challenges, the new shifts in culture, constituency and location. If you do not know what these are, you need to learn them. What does the community face now? I remember doing some field research on homelessness. Everyone in town pointed to one organization as the central hub of helping the poor in the community because they'd been doing it for 25 years. But that was working from old data.

When we actually went and asked those suffering from poverty they were going to a few other, newer organizations in town because that older group was actually very mean to the people they worked with. We needed to adapt the overall data we were working with to better reflect what was happening right now, and then begin to address our practices and support accordingly. In both the first and second points here the leaders of renewal are involved in a dialectal practice of listening, formulating, getting feedback, implementing, etc. from people both on the inside and outside of the community.

Moving from a birthright culture to a convincement culture
I plan to write more on this soon, but part of renewal is to shift from a culture of implicit knowledge that gets passed down by a few family members, experts, or bearers of the tradition, to an explicit community rooted in collective intelligence. That is to say, one where ownership, understanding, and apprenticeship is more readily available for those who have historically not been insiders or, in some cases literally "born into the community." In a word, to move from a birthright culture to a convincement culture is to have better, clearer systems in place for on-boarding, mentorship, and human development. This builds into the overall system and culture a more participatory community because everyone knows what is going on, what is expected, and how to succeed within this community.

Creating new systems that can help sustain the changes

Finally, in renewal work, systems, processes, practices, need to be put in place so that it can sustain the changes. It is one thing to be in a church or a meeting that wants to have a safe place for children, it is quite a different thing to create policy and practice and follow-through with doing this. Often the word "system" is though of in negative terms, as in "oppressive systems." There are plenty of these out there of which we can draw counter-examples. But here I mean systems in a different sense. Systems that enable us to create the kind of community we all want to be a part of. Systems that create containers and boundaries around what direction we intend to go, and which directions, behaviors, or mindsets are harmful to that which we are pursuing. This is not easy and will require hard and possibly long conversations, but it is also very rewarding when you are able to help bring people along.

It's not exactly an elevator pitch, but this is an attempt to put some arms around the idea of renewal in our communities. All of this points to renewal as a revitalization of the tradition embodied by the community, rather than renewal as in numeric gains, bigger budgets, etc. though in my limited experience a more compelling and vital community is one that will "grow" in other ways as well. Thanks for reading and thanks for any feedback you have to offer.

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