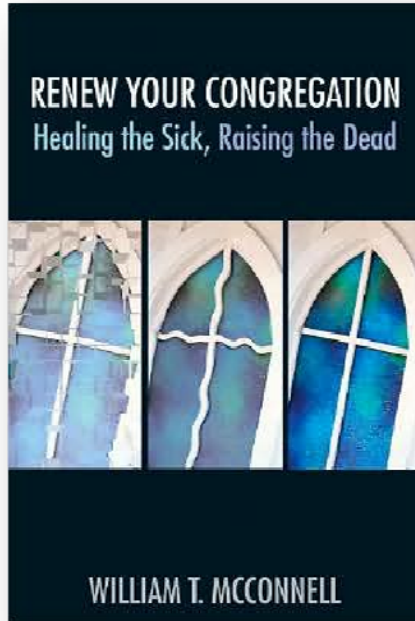


Church Health Resource Review

By Ron Cary



Renew Your Congregation: Healing the Sick, Raising the Dead

William T. McConnell, Chalice Press, publisher 2007

At the beginning of a book, when the author writes, “I don’t think I have had an original thought in my life,” you assume either he doesn’t expect to sell many books, or this is going to be a different kind of book than most people would write. For Bill McConnell, the answer seems to be the latter. He is unflinchingly honest about the subject of congregational transformation/revitalization. When asked, “What is the key to church revitalization?” he answers, “No one has the key.” Then he goes on to provide a “recipe” that can assist the reader in thinking about and planning for transformation that fits the readers unique situation.

Oh, there are plenty of good thoughts and great ideas that will stir the reader's thinking and provide new insights.

Pastors in particular will identify with many of the humorous stories McConnell tells out of decades of pastoral experience in a mainline Protestant congregation (Disciples of Christ). McConnell is still the pastor of a local church, and what drew me to the book is that he writes about real people, in real situations, doing real ministry. For McConnell, church revitalization is difficult but doable. In fact, today it is an absolute necessity!

This is not a “how to do church transformation in 10 easy steps” kind of book. It is neither simplistic nor overly complex. McConnell invites the reader to simply think about what various thoughts and ideas concerning transformation might mean in the reader's context. Each chapter ends with “lessons learned,” a recap of a few of the themes addressed in the chapter. My suggestion is to begin with the “lessons learned” and then decide whether reading that particular chapter would be helpful. The nuggets in “lessons learned” would also provide for good discussion in either a clergy or church leaders study group.

Along this line, the American Baptist Churches of Michigan is offering pastors and interested lay leaders an opportunity this fall and winter (2009-10), to learn more about congregational transformation directly from Bill McConnell as he leads us in a series of three “webinars.” Elink and the Region website (www.abc-mi.org) will provide more details, or you can contact me, Ron Cary, at rcary@abc-mi.org. It is our hope that the webinars and the book will become a source of study and conversation in small groups such as our Region Ministry Leadership Groups (MLG’s).

I want to conclude this review by listing a few of McConnell's thoughts and ideas from "lessons learned." If any of them intrigue or interest you, get the book and learn more!

- Church transformation is not about finding the right program ... that will fix the problem and make everything right. Church transformation is discovering God's vision for the church and pursuing it.
- Revitalization of a church is difficult, dirty work. If transformation were easy, everyone would be doing it.
- One of the major blockages to church transformation is fearful leadership.
- Churches don't change because of committees or resources or consultants. It is because God brings a leader into the situation and equips the leader to do the job.
- Become a permission-giving church instead of a church that limits what lay people are allowed to do in ministry.
- To do a church transformation, the pastor and lay leaders must be committed to hang in there for the long haul. Many times we pastors leave too soon.
- If love is left out of the equation, church transformation will never happen.
- Transformation is not to be done alone.