

Doing Church in Uncharted Territory

a discussion guide related to
Tod Bolsinger's plenary session
at the 2021 Annual Conference,
Church of the Brethren

But, how?

With a health, financial, and social pandemic all happening at once, none of us have experienced such a time in life as this. Amidst all the questions being asked, there is one in our churches which continues to surface:

How do we move forward in this uncharted territory as churches, being “Jesus in the neighborhood” (e.g., our community and networks)?

*During his 2021 Annual Conference plenary, Tod Bolsinger of Fuller Theological Seminary invited leaders into two distinct spaces, that of **reflection** and **moving forward**.*

This discussion guide is intended to serve as a resource for the individual, small group, or congregation to enter those spaces and consider the possibilities of right now.

Guiding the Discussion

GATHER

If sharing this conversation with others, choose a setting that encourages a safe and confidential sharing of stories and ideas. If walking through this guide independent of others, try to ensure that your surroundings are distraction-free, and you've gifted yourself the time to invest in this work with the Lord. Being ever mindful of how, where, and with whom we consider questions of faith increases the likelihood for deeper self-examination and a strengthening of connections in community.

VIDEO INCORPORATION

This guide was created as a companion piece to Tod Bolsinger's 2021 Annual Conference plenary session: "Doing Church In Uncharted Territory." A video of that plenary is available at https://youtu.be/n_23-maC_KE. Viewing the video is a required part of this learning experience.

DISCUSSION

*The video is formatted into two sessions, each 90 minutes in length. For the purposes of this discussion guide, we refer to the first 90-minute session as **reflection** and the second 90-minute session as **moving forward**.*

You're asked to stop the video after each 90-minute session and engage in the discussion questions provided – or – reflect on the questions individually if you are viewing the video on your own.

It is not necessary to view and discuss both 90-minute sessions at the same time; feel free to break up your learning experience into multiple days. Additionally, it is not necessary to use all the discussion questions provided. It might be more fitting for you to choose only those questions most relevant to your context. If possible, though, please conclude your time with the wrap-up exercise.

Overall, take as much time as you deem wise for your discussion experience. There is no expected or ideal time frame.

Part One: Reflection

Timestamps are provided to establish the part of the video the discussion question relates to. Timestamp video segments do *not* need to be shown to discuss the question(s).

Adaptive Challenges vs. Technical Challenges @1:45

- *Which challenges do you find that you or your leadership spend the most time figuring out when doing church in uncharted territory: adaptive or technical challenges?*

When the world changed: Friday, March 13, 2020 @2:00

- *Where were you when you knew your church—and the world—was about to change?*

Change is constant – and speeding up @9:30

- *After many months of virtual, hybrid, outside-the-box experiences...
...With 4-5 words, how are you, really?
...What have been the biggest shifts in your day-to-day life?
...What have been the primary learning curves in your work world?
...What's something that would give you relief if you never had to do again?*

How do we live in a rapidly changing world? @11:05

- *As you think back over ALL your church years—not just the most recent—what are some of the biggest changes you've experienced?*

Resistance vs. Recognition @12:30

- *In what moment did you stop resisting change and recognize the reality we're in?*

Dispatches from the Future @14:25

- *Who have been the change agents who have helped guide you through this season?*
- *What do you now need to prepare for the future; what do you need to prepare for change?*

“The antidote to exhaustion is wholeheartedness.” –David Whyte @17:56

- *What's something that has gotten you through this past year and a half?*
- *What's something to which you can “give your full powers”?*
- *How are you currently approaching your calling: half-heartedly or whole-heartedly?*

Two stages of a crisis @22:42

- *What were your immediate responses in the acute stage of this crisis?*
- *If you've shifted from the acute stage to the adaptive stage, when did that happen?*
- *If you or your church have not shifted yet, what might be keeping you “stuck,” not moving?*

An apocalyptic moment

@27:15

- *What questions have surfaced that have allowed you to address underlying issues that you didn't have the will to confront before these crises?*
- *What have you discovered to be underlying issues that aren't just quick fixes?*

Surviving vs. Thriving

@28:50

- *Do the relationships in your church help individuals survive or thrive?*
- *How, then, do those relationships affect your church's posture of surviving vs. thriving?*
- *As a leader, how have you been treated through this season?*

Common Underlying Conditions

@33:25

- *What have you learned about the depth of discipleship in your church?*
- *What has been revealed about the fellowship of your Christian community?*
- *Some say it is 20% of the congregation that does 80% of the work. During this season, it has seemed more like 5% has done 95%. What percentage would you give your church?*
- *On what subject do you wish you had more training / experience / abilities that could have helped you navigate this last year less tumultuously?*

Spirit of Adventure

@38:30

- *From where are you seeking new learning opportunities for the future?*
- *From whom have you learned the most in the last year?*

Wrapping Up Reflection

*Take 1-2 minutes and make a list of all that has been lost in the last 18 months.
Beside each loss, note how you've grieved / are grieving.
If you haven't yet, spend some moments considering
how you might face these losses before moving forward.*

Part Two: Moving Forward

Timestamps are provided to establish the part of the video the discussion question relates to. Timestamp video segments do *not* need to be shown to discuss the question(s).

A different form of leadership

@52:55

- Create two columns, one with the title “technical challenges” and the other with the title “adaptive challenges.” Take a few minutes and make a list of all the technical challenges you’ve faced in the last year. Then, make a list of all the adaptive challenges you’ve faced.

Our values and identity

@57:05

- Share a moment from this season where your personal values have been challenged. Who did this happen with? What helped you move forward from the moment of challenge?

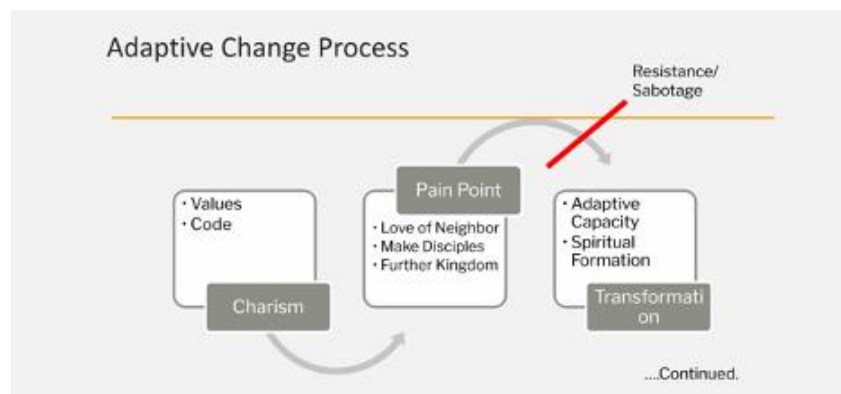
Essential vs. Expendable

@58:10

- Consider the story you just shared through the lenses of “essential” vs. “expendable.” What was essential and non-negotiable in the challenge? What did you determine was expendable?

A keystone adaptive question

@58:57



**Make copies of this graphic and then distribute to your group to enhance conversation. A larger version is available at the end of this guide for you to reproduce. Another option is to project this graphic via PowerPoint.*

- Name some of the pain points in your community and/or neighborhood.
- How might the charism (e.g., unique values, giftedness, DNA) of your congregation address the pain points of your community as an expression of God’s mission in the world?

Your unique congregation

@1:00:37

- How is your congregation uniquely wired to express its gifts to your community?

Your unique neighbors

@1:04:28

- In what ways does your congregation listen to the neighbors in your community?
- How do you learn what those around you need?

Resistance

@1:05:20

- *What kinds of resistance—or even sabotage—have you experienced in this last 18 months as you’ve walked through different moments of change?*
- *What kinds of resistance might you already be anticipating as you consider how to move your uniquely wired congregation forward to meet the needs of your uniquely wired community?*

People don’t resist change; they resist loss

@1:05:55

- *How has your church given space for people to grieve their losses in this season?*

For change to last, it must be a healthy adaptation of the “DNA”

@1:11:47

- *What are the core values of your church?*
- *Does your church know its values?*
- *Does your church understand how the decisions being made align with those values?*
- *What loss has been experienced because of a disconnect of not understanding values?*

Your DNA

@1:17:18

- *What kinds of spaces could you create for your church members to tell their stories?*
- *Are your church’s current values aspirational (what you’re striving to be) or actual (who you really are)?*

Wrapping Up *Moving Forward*

(@1:19:55)

*Telling stories can change the trajectory of a church.
Consider the following prompts and choose one to tell a story from your church’s history that you’re familiar with, witnessed, were a part of, or that’s a part of you.*

Tell a story from your church’s history about a hero.

Tell a story from your church’s history about a cherished moment that is retold again and again.

*Tell a story from your church’s history that says,
“This is what we are really all about.”*

*Tell a story from your church’s history that says,
“This was a moment when I was most proud of us.”*

*Tell a story from your church’s history that says,
“This was when I knew I had found my place.”*

For more resources from Dr. Tod Bolsinger visit:
<https://equip-courses.fuller.edu/?s=Tod+Bolsinger>

Adaptive Change Process

