

Today I want to talk a bit about Path of Renewal. If you have been around this congregation you will have heard the name and perhaps have been wondering why you haven't heard it for a while. A year past in December this congregation, along with 22 others was picked to be part of a pilot scheme – the Path of Renewal. The central committees of the church agreed that, by and large, what we do has become less and less effective over the years. The way we organise church, the way we run church, the times we have church are designed for an age which no longer exists. The world has changed around us and the church no longer has a central place in society.

The way we organise things is called 'attractional' and it's all about getting people to come to us, join in with us, become like us, and replicate us. Think back: days when you worked in one company; the church had a voice in society – General Assembly reported in the papers.

Everything has changed. Generations of people have grown up never entering a church; not having any idea of what happens inside; with no knowledge of the bible; no concept of who Jesus is; unwilling to commit to any organisation.

CofS decided to try something new – have talked about it for years; CWW Report and others before that.

At the start of the process there was great excitement and we were glad to have been chosen. I went off to different training events and read all the books they recommended. People volunteered to join the local group to take things forward – if you are in the POR group would you please stand up. What happened though was that the folks who were organising the process changed the focus half way through the year. That was in response to our feedback and thinking together. It meant that nothing seemed to happen for a very long time though. They are starting to think about when to bring in the next group of churches to the process and it looks like applications in Oct or Nov and starting in January 2018. Existing groups are expected to help and support the new groups. Interestingly, it has already been decided that they will not 'sell it' in the same way they did for us. It was sold as a three year process that would bring lasting change to a congregation, however, it became obvious fairly quickly that was unlikely to happen. Consequently, the explanation and information for the new congregations is going to be different.

In our reading it says: *If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Heb 11:15*

Caterpillar. The back doesn't move, or moves very slowly. Church structures and organisation tweaked but essentially the same; GA – during the week, take holiday? Presbytery – still the same. Congregation? We've made changes but they are essentially about maintaining or tweaking what we have. Even MC is a come and join us event.

I want to make clear that I think there is a place for MC, YC, etc, however, I think we have to be honest – Sunday morning: provide for visitors, enquirers, life-long believers, children, teens, older people; mix old and new music; follow a pattern – hymn prayer sandwich; have some sort of message and do it all in an hour – an hour and a quarter. The main thing that it doesn't really do well is encourage discipleship.

I can stand here and preach my heart out, plead, challenge, explain passages etc but you have to decide what to do with what you hear. It is essentially passing on information. Even if you decide to respond to something you hear, who is there to help you once you leave the building? Discipleship happens best when it happens with others. If someone is going to hold you accountable for sticking to your bible reading plan you are more likely to do your reading. And if that person is going to talk about what you've learnt, and encourage you to keep going, even if you get it wrong occasionally, it makes it easier.

Essentially, the process has developed to focus on discipleship – that is working out how best to follow Jesus. That is what a missional model of church is about – God's people being church every day wherever they are – and that's what the POR process is hoping we move toward.

Heb 11:8 *By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.*

Picture of Bridges zones:

Explain

We don't know where we're going. The group are in the Neutral Zone and what the ministers who are involved have found is that their groups want to get through it as quickly as possible and move on. It is hard to wait. We're not used to it. We want instant results. The problem is we want to be as sure as we can be that we're listening for God and doing what he wants.

Hebrews 11:9 *By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country*

What is it like being a stranger in a foreign country? Language, customs, money etc it is uncomfortable.

Any change is uncomfortable and the problem is you default to what you know – that's why pilots spend so much time on flight simulators: in the moment of danger you default to what you know, so they have to 'know' what to do in different situations.

Like Lewis and Clark we're going to have to adapt to our new situation.

### **With your small Group**

Help people nurture & develop their relationship with God

- Spiritual disciplines

Create an interdependence between the members of your group

- Not competitive but supportive

- 1 Corinthians 12

Start to "give away" some things you do

Congregation: Pray