

Lesson 1: The Shape of “Shaping”

Purpose

This lesson explores the idea of change, both cultural and ecclesial, and what we might learn from biblical and contemporary responses to change.

Goals

To articulate responses to and identify questions about Dr. Stephen Hayner’s essay
To explore the idea of cultural change
To examine your particular church context

Materials

newsprint or paper
tape
markers, pens or pencils
copies of Hayner’s “The Shaping of Things to Come?”
Bibles

Preparation

Participants should have been given the web address and been instructed to read Hayner’s essay, “The Shaping of Things to Come?” prior to your times together.

The statements for Step 1 need to be written on sheets of newsprint or paper and posted on walls or tables.

Sequence

1. As participants enter the space, invite them to respond to the following statements, posted on walls or tables:
 - Change is good.
 - Change is bad.
 - Change is necessary.
 - I wish the church would change...
 - The church should never change...
 - The more things change...Ask for reactions to the statements and responses.
2. Participants hopefully will have read Hayner’s essay before coming to class. Invite everyone to share first impressions. Ask for questions, and write them down on a blank piece of newsprint or paper to be addressed as a group. Attempt to answer questions together, using copies of Hayner’s essay. If a question cannot be answered, leave it, and see if it perhaps will be answered during the rest of your time together.
3. Dr. Hayner describes some particular cultural shifts that he understands to be behind the new movement within Christianity. Do you agree or disagree with his assessment of current culture? What would you add to the list of cultural changes? How is your community affected by these changes? Your church? Your family? You, personally?

4. Invite half of the group to turn to Ecclesiastes 4:4-10, and read the passage aloud together. Invite the other half of the group to turn to Isaiah 43:15-21, and read it aloud together. As a large group, consider these questions: Is there a prevailing biblical understanding of change? What are some other biblical texts that deal with change? Throughout Scripture, how have the people of God handled change, from without and from within? How has God handled change? Does God change?
5. Dr. Hayner holds up new communities of faith as people who are being authentic to God's call in changing times. He says that all of us are being called to "re-examine our traditions in light of both the new realities of the culture and the biblical mandates of the Gospel." How might you begin to do that? What traditions do you have that should be examined? Are any of your traditions "sacred cows," above examination? What can your faith community learn from the new communities Hayner describes? What does your faith community have to offer those new communities?
6. Look back at your list of unanswered questions from step 2. If any can be answered now, given your group discussion, do so. Ask for volunteers to find answers to the remaining questions, if possible. Close with prayer, offering gratitude for God's continued faithfulness to those who seek to follow and be changed by God.

Lesson 2: “Tradition, Tradition!”

Purpose

This lesson explores the idea of tradition in a role-play based on the Sermon on the Mount.

Goals

To examine traditions in your own life and the life of your church

To engage the Sermon on the Mount through the lens of tradition and through the practice of role-play

Materials

Several copies of the final 6 paragraphs of Dr. Martha Moore-Keish’s essay (under the heading “Questions to this new movement”

Several copies of paragraphs 3-6 of Dr. Marcia Riggs’ essay

Bibles

Preparation

Prior to your time together, request half of the participants read Moore-Keish’s essay; request the other half read Riggs’ essay.

Sequence

1. Invite participants to share an example of a tradition they hold dear, and the ways in which it has evolved (if any). After everyone has had a chance to share, ask if there are any traditions at your church that have grown over the years, or any that have fallen away with time. Allow time for sharing stories.
2. Invite the group into a time of role-playing, where they are members of your church’s Worship Committee. The issue for this particular meeting is beginning a second worship service: What style of worship should it be? When should it happen? Who will be worshiping at this service?
 - a. You will act as Chairperson (or invite a class member to play this role). The rest of the participants will be divided into halves by their prior reading assignments. Pass out the abridged versions of the essays by Moore-Keish and Riggs to the appropriate groups to use as resources if they did not bring their own copies.
 - b. Instruct the group that they are to use whichever essay they read as the basis for their opinions on church tradition.
 - c. Invite the two halves of the class to find Matthew 5:1-12 in their Bibles, and tell them that the Pastor would like this second worship service (whatever it may look like) to be based on Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Allow time for the two groups to read the passage, and to make notes and discuss initial impressions.
 - d. As “Chairperson,” call the meeting to order, and open up discussion of the new worship service. A final decision or plan of action may not be reached.
 - e. At the conclusion of your “meeting” (or whenever you see fit to bring the role-play to a close), invite everyone to come back together as one large group

to evaluate the exercise with the discussion points: What questions have been raised for you after engaging in the role-play? Did any conflicts arise within your group? What ideas from the two papers resonated with today's issue, and what ideas were difficult to translate into this situation? How do these two essays and their explanations of tradition help you understand Jesus' Sermon on the Mount? What does Jesus have to say about tradition in that passage? What might our imaginary Worship Committee glean from that information?

3. Close by reading Matthew 5:1-12 aloud together. Invite participants to join in prayer together, sharing joys and concerns, and giving thanks for traditions old and new.

Lesson 3: “Talkin’ ‘Bout My Generation”

Purpose

This lesson explores the ways in which today’s generation has reacted to the traditional church, and offers participants a way to respond.

Goals

To creatively respond to descriptors of traditional and new expressions of church
To explore language to and about God through the Psalms

Materials

Whiteboard or newsprint, marker

Art supplies: colored paper, old magazines, markers or crayons, pencils, scissors, tape
Bibles

Preparation

If there’s no whiteboard, post the newsprint so all can see.

Art supplies should be available for use.

Sequence

1. Invite participants to brainstorm word-associations for six words: spiritual, religious, individual, communal, consumerist, sacrificial. Write each word on the whiteboard or a piece of newsprint, and ask people to say aloud the first thing that pops into their mind, creating a list of those words. Do this for each of the six words listed above.
2. Dr. Rodger Nishioka’s extensive work with young adults (in their 20s and 30s) has pointed to significantly empty pews in traditional mainline churches, and to new communities of faith forming across the globe, communities that are radically different from traditional worshipping congregations. In conversations with young adults, Nishioka continually encounters the same explanations: “I’m spiritual, but not religious,” and “the church just doesn’t meet my needs.” Have you ever heard anyone describe themselves this way? What do these phrases mean to you?
3. Nishioka describes this “spiritual not religious” phenomenon using two other pairs of words: “individual and communal”, and “consumerist and sacrificial.” Break the large group into three smaller groups, and assign each group one of these pairs of words. Ask each group to create an image of their word pair using the art supplies.
4. Invite the groups to share their images with everyone, displaying them where they can be seen, and encourage groups to ask questions of one another. Share that Nishioka’s essay sets up a tension between the words in each pair, as we heard with “spiritual, but not religious”: he worries that the new faith communities of the younger generation are too individual, compared to the traditional churches, and that they are too consumerist, compared to Christ’s call to sacrificial living. Were you able to create a single image using both words in your pair? Did you find a commonality, or did you highlight the tension between the two words?

- What, if anything, appeals to you about your image, one or both of your words? What do you think appeals to older generations about one or both of your words? To younger generations? (If participants are from multiple generations, you can do an interview exercise, pairing members of different ages to ask one another these questions.)
5. Break the groups up into pairs, and assign each pair one or two psalms to read: Psalm 3, 12, 13, 44, 60, 67, 75, 91, 117, 142. Invite the pairs to discuss: Is this psalm prayed by an individual or by a group? What can you discern about the faith communities of the writers of these psalms? How do you imagine younger generations might read these psalms? Older generations? How do the sentiments expressed in your psalms compare to the ways your church talks to and about God?
 6. As a large group, use the art supplies to create an image or a logo for your faith community. Incorporate as many or as few of the six words you began with as you would like. When your image is complete, invite participants to share: How do you think this image reflects the generation(s) of its creators? If you had to do this task 10 years ago, how would the image be different? How does your image respond to the “spiritual but not religious” generation?
 7. Choose a psalm, or several verses from different psalms, to read together as a group as a closing prayer.