

Foundation of Trust

Greetings in the spirit of Christ's love!

My name is Tom Bandy. For over twenty years I have consulted with churches of all sizes, cultures, theologies, and traditions ... in North American and internationally. My website is www.ThrivingChurch.com.

Many churches yearn for renewal, but many church leaders and members have become cynical and are resigned to decline.

Why is it that churches follow a visioning process, experience a burst of energy and outreach for a time, but are unable to sustain it? Volunteers burn out, generosity dries up, and the church is back to where it started.

And why is it that churches complete a strategic planning process - by themselves or even the help of an experienced outside consultant, - and the recommendations collect dust in a closet? New ideas are never implemented; programs are never improved; outmoded tactics are not terminated; and nothing really changes.

The real reason is not sparse resources or outside adversity. The real reason is a lack of trust. If a church lacks fundamental trust, then even the most sincere visioning processes will fail to bear fruit; and carefully crafted strategic plans will not be implemented.

Therefore, wise churches first build a foundation of trust. Trust allows them risk following God's vision, because volunteers trust that they will be appreciated and supported. Trust allows them to initiate creative ideas, and make changes to programs and property, because they trust staff and church members will cooperate respectfully and charitably even in times of stress.

What is a foundation of trust? Trust is a clear consensus about core values and bedrock beliefs.

The first element of trust is shared core values.

St. Paul describes core values in Galatians 5 as the "fruits of the Spirit", including love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self control. These are the predictably positive ways Christians treat each other seven days

a week. They are in marked contrast to the way non-Christians behave: jealousy, envy, anger; quarreling, gossiping; dissension, denigration, selfishness, and so on.

Paul elaborates further in Romans 12. Love genuinely, rejoice in good times and bad, be patient in tribulation, go to extremes in hospitality. Rejoice in good times and bad, live in harmony with others, and overcome evil with good. Be constant in prayer, practice humility, live peaceably with all, and be aglow with the Spirit.

You see, a core value is not a vague ideal, wishful thinking, or a personal preference for this or that program. A core value is a positive, predictable behavior pattern for which members will hold one another accountable; and that visitors will expect to experience whenever they are around church people. Volunteers will never burn out, because they will live in a culture of trust.

Effective non-profits, health care, and social services know how important core values are to the sustainability of any organization. The church is no different.

The second element of trust is shared bedrock beliefs.

The Old is filled with illustrations of faithful people turning to God in times of stress. David is on the run, but believes the Lord is his Shepherd. Job suffers greatly, but is confident that his redeemer lives. Israel faces war, but Isaiah proclaims: *Fear not! For I am with you! I will help you, strengthen you, and uphold you with my victorious right hand!*

So also the New Testament is filled with examples Christians staking their lives on clear convictions. In the midst of persecution, Paul declares nothing shall separate us from the love of God in Christ. Perfect love casts out fear. Ask, and it will be given; seek and you will find. If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation! There will be a new heaven and a new earth, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

You see, a bedrock belief is not a dogma, a theology, or an abstraction. It is a deep faith conviction to which people turn immediately and automatically ... for strength ... in times of trouble or stress. Seekers are not really interested in our theology. They are interested in the convictions on which we stake our

career, our relationships, our lifestyles, and our very lives. A Bedrock Belief is the bottom-line confidence that allows Christians to hope for tomorrow. A church will do anything, change anything, initiate anything, terminate anything, and risk everything ... if they know what they *really* believe.

This, then, is the Foundation of Trust.

When a church has clear consensus about core values and bedrock beliefs, they create a context in which they can actually hear God speak. They will not be distracted by self-interest or public pressure. They will be able to discern God's will for their lives. They can follow a vision discernment process, and their energy enthusiasm will be sustained over the long haul.

When a church has clear consensus about core values and bedrock beliefs, they can do strategic planning with confidence. The recommendations will not end up in a closet because people are too afraid, or too doubtful, to take a risk. Plans will be implemented. The cost of discipleship will be paid. The church will renew itself and adapt itself to be effective in changing times.

Before you begin vision discernment ... and before you start a strategic planning process... build a foundation of trust. In the next two videos, I will explain how to build clarity and consensus about core values and beliefs.

Thank you for your commitment to renew the church to bless the world!