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Reinvention

Restarting as a New Congregation

One of the Ten “R” s for Plotting a New Congregational Course

Reinvention is one of at least ten choices available to congregations who need to engage in transitions and changes that could lead to transformation as they plot a new course for their congregation. This is when an existing congregation rethinks everything it does—like an extreme makeover—and restarts as a new congregation.

The key is that it realizes it cannot do it without giving authority over to an outside leader to make the changes. Making the transitions and changes themselves is too painful of a process without outside assistance. They may have even tried **Redirection**, but ultimately realized they were unwilling to make the transitions and changes themselves, so they must give authority to someone else to do so.

The way **Reinvention** works is for a congregation to begin with the assumption that they have a group of people who want to restart a new congregation. They even have a facility. They may or may not have a pastor and other staff. They have some financial and other resources that can be used.

But, they lack two things. First, is the will and capacity to make sufficient transitions and changes that will reinvent the congregation without giving someone else the authority—likely from outside the congregation—to make essential transitions and changes.

Second, they lack a minimum of 21 leaders within the congregation who are active, able-bodied, spiritually maturing and always seeking to discern God’s will for their congregation, possess good leadership capacities, open to innovation, focused on the future rather than the past of the congregation, believe their church is God’s church and not their church, are continually learning about how congregations can be vital and vibrant, and believe passionately in the future of this congregation.

Why Restart as a New Congregation?

Here are seven reasons for restarting a new congregation. Perhaps you can think of more.

1. Because without restarting your congregation is going to become a preaching station at subsistence level that is more like a chaplaincy ministry. It can continue to exist but will likely lack vitality and vibrancy. Eventually it will die.
2. Because everything else you have tried to do to survive has not worked. Now it is time to do something extreme that seeks to help your congregation thrive rather than die.
3. Because you have been unwilling or unable to make the necessary transitions and changes, and it is time for you to empower someone else to do it for you. If we live long enough as individuals we all become dependent on others. Your congregation may have reached that point.
4. Because God is not finished with your congregation yet. There are many opportunities and challenges ahead of you that you can address with God’s help.
5. Because the Kingdom of God needs every congregation reaching their full potential, and with God’s help you can once again be a full Kingdom potential congregation.
6. Because you no longer have a critical mass of 21 key empowering leaders in your congregation, so you must engage with external leadership that can restart, rebrand, and relaunch your congregation.
7. Because it is not about survival. It is about the new thing God could do through a newly formed congregation passionate of God’s empowering vision.

How to Restart as a New Congregation?

The “how” of restarting a new congregation is radical and extreme. It is essential a congregation realizes this from the beginning.

1. As with all the choices available to congregation who need to plot a new course, **Reinvention** must be both a spiritual and strategic decision. Care and concern must be expressed for all people impacted, and God’s empowering vision must be clear concerning the restart congregation.
2. It is extremely important to deal with the “why” of restarting. What is motivating your congregation to be open to a restart? Survival is an insufficient motivation. It must be about God’s leadership for your future. Only trust in God will see your congregation through this process.
3. Identify a group of six people who are people of passion about the future of the church. Establish them as a Lead Team for the **Reinvention** of the congregation. Empower them in several ways. First, to seek outside training and counsel on how to restart a congregation.
4. Second, empower them to make crucial decisions about the restarting of the congregation without having to ask for permission on many of the details. It is important that these are respected, trustworthy leaders of the congregation who care deeply for all people and about God’s empowering vision for the restart of the congregation.
5. Obtain training for your pastor in restarting congregations to be sure your pastor is prepared to lead this process. If you do not have a pastor, or your pastor realizes leading a restart is not within the call of God on their ministry, seek a pastor with restarting awareness and training plus the skills to guide the restarting process. The pastor becomes the seventh member of a Lead Team of people of passion.
6. Develop a plan to restart the congregation, and then seek outside counsel to evaluate the plan as to whether it is sufficiently spiritual, strategic, and feasible as a plan that could result in the restarting of the congregation. Ask this outside counsel to coach the congregation for up to 18 months as you seek to fulfill the plan to restart the congregation.
7. Engage in a process to rebrand the congregation, and then to relaunch the congregation as a restart congregation. Realize that rebranding and relaunching the congregation is only the beginning and the process forward **Reinvention** may take 18 to 36 months.

What is the Impact of Restarting as a New Congregation?

Here are seven possible impacts. There will be others you can name.

1. Yes, this is an extreme, radical restart. It does not mean the congregation is seeking to move away from the substance of the gospel. But, it became willing to lay aside its historic practices in favor of a new strategy, structure, and style focused on the future rather than captivated by the past.
2. Restarting a congregation is not an event. It is an ongoing process. Participants in the congregation in its previous form will need some time to transition to the new form of the congregation. Be compassionate with all people. Yet, keep moving forward.
3. Not everyone will go forward with the new restart congregation. Some people will take this as an opportunity to go to a different congregation. They cannot handle all the transitions and changes, or they were holding on to the previous form of the congregation. Give them space and the blessings of the congregation to move on to another congregation.
4. It is highly possible there will be a great sense of excitement around the new things God is doing through the restart. New things should be celebrated. New stories should be told and shared broadly. Key points of progress should be noted, and thanksgiving given to our Triune God.
5. A new understanding of God’s empowering vision for the restart congregation will provide focus and meaning to each Sunday and each season of the year. The new vision should be continually cast to where it creates new memories.
6. New people will connect to the restart congregation, so the opportunity exists to practice radial hospitality and assimilation. New people should be involved in small groups and leadership roles.
7. New relationships will be established with God and with new friends in the congregation that will allow for dynamic spiritual formation, leadership development, and missional engagement. A spiritually maturing congregation will be a hallmark of the success of the restart.