

**When Congregations are Family and Not Just**

**Friends or Acquaintances**

By

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Latterly\*, I was in a conversation with a small group of people about helping congregations who are in the Old Age Stage of the congregational life cycle to engage in radical transition and change that would lead to a new life of vitality and vibrancy.

Present were pastoral leaders, staff of the local denominational—a Baptist association in this case, and a staff person of the regional denomination—a Baptist state convention in this case. The conversation provided an excellent example of the difference between a membership or family relationship with congregations, and an affiliation or friend/acquaintance relationship with congregations.

The regional denominational staff person indicated they are available to engage in an assessment of these congregations, figure out what strategy will work for them, and offer one of three pathways. If the congregation accepts their recommendation they are glad to engage with them. If the congregation rejects their recommendation they are willing to walk away from that congregational situation.

I was astonished at the statement. Yet, I would admit it was an overstatement and the regional denominational staff person did not mean to say it the way it came across.

In a Baptist association, congregations are family members. Churches-in-association at their very best are examples of a no-exit relationship with one another. If a congregation rejects what to external observers is a way forward for their situation, they are still family. They are still a congregation of worth created in the image of God.

This is because associations are about relationship with one another. They are about helping congregations to be on a Christ-centered, faith-based journey with one another from the base of the fellowship area of the association.

There is not walking away!

\*: *latterly* is a term with deep heritage in British English—yet in less use now---that somewhat means the same thing as *recently* or *lately*, but not exactly. It does not necessarily carry as strong a connotation of time such as to imply earlier today, yesterday, or even this week. Perhaps a three-word way to say it is *in recent times*. *Latterly* events and experiences often require contextual interpretation. They also have historical significance and have implications for future actions—if people desire to learn from history.