

**Gaining Traction for a Radical Congregational Transformation**

*Or, Fixin’ to Get Ready to Commence to Begin to Start to Do Something – Maybe!*

*Part Three*

By

George W. Bullard Jr., Director

Columbia Metro Baptist Association

***GeorgeBullard@ColumbiaMetro.org***

[***www.ColumbiaMetro.org***](http://www.ColumbiaMetro.org)

Why are radical methods of transformation necessary to transform congregations who are in late Retirement, Old Age, or near Death? Why is transition and change that is continuous or discontinuous with the past not enough?

By the time congregations have spun though the Retirement stage multiple times, have entered the Old Age stage, or are at Death’s door, anything less than radical transformation is a short-term fix that lasts only a brief time and then another fix is needed. A long-term solution with radical transformation is the only thing that will provide a promising future for these congregations, honor God’s leadership, and effectively connect with the church’s community context or affinity groups it seeks to reach.

**Acceleration and On-Ramps**

A key consideration is the rate or pace of transition and change to use to gain traction for radical congregational transformation. Think of it as the speed acceleration rate and the length of the on-ramp onto an interstate highway.

Some speed rates and on-ramps must be fast and short, or the congregation is going to die before they are transformed. Some speed rates and on-ramps can be long and the speed of transition and change slower because the congregation has anticipated the need to transform and is willing to engage in a long-term process to gain traction.

Some speed rates and on-ramps unfortunately must be slow and long because the congregation is weak, resistant, and even dysfunctional. At the same time the opposite can be true. The speed rate must be fast, and the on-ramps must short for almost the same reason – the congregation is weak, resistant, and even dysfunctional, but it has little time left.

The longer a congregation waits to engage in transition and change, the more likely it is that they must accelerate fast or get run over by other cars on the interstate. This happens when there is no acceleration on-ramp due to bad engineering. In the case of congregations this is due to long-term malaise and even dysfunction that has been overlooked or to which the congregation has accommodated.

What some people inside and outside the congregation want to do is takeover the congregation and make them do what they do not want to do. A takeover can work. It can also do violence to everyone involved. It is a dilemma as the congregation may not die in the short-term. Without a takeover they may spend valuable Kingdom resources. Ultimately when they do die, they leave no resources for a legacy, and a building where repair costs cast doubt on the future use of that physical resource.

In denominations with congregational polity where each local congregation is autonomous, forced transformation is a difficult issue to address. From a human and governance perspective, congregations have the right to resist transformation, hold on as long as they can, then die. It is sad, but they do.