



A HOPE-FILLED CONVERSATION FOR THE FUTURE



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Many churches are considering their future. So much has changed in our current culture and some churches are struggling to find their way, asking hard questions about options to consider. Should we continue to meet? Should we consider closing? Could we partner with another healthy congregation? Would a church merger ever make sense? What options are even possible?

Other churches are healthy and growing. And yet, increasingly, many of those churches as well, are considering partnering with other local churches to strengthen their ministry and broaden the potential impact in their community.

Part of the new vision for the CBAC is to help churches ask those important questions and challenge churches to have hope-filled conversations for the future of their congregation. As a church, how can we best fulfill the mission of God's Church in our community?

We are excited that you are having this hope-filled conversation! We know that you believe in the Church and your heart's desire is to see your church thrive and make a difference in your community. This conversation is a part of birthing that desire and taking steps toward a brighter future!

This conversation has two parts:

- 1. Gauging the temperature of our church and defining a clear sense of current reality.*
- 2. Answering the questions: Do we want to be well? What things can we do and what options are possible to help us be well?*

CONVERSATION PART 1

Gauging the temperature of our congregation and defining clear current reality.

In John 5:5-6 we read, “Beside the pool was a man who had been sick for 38 years. When Jesus saw the man and realized that he had been crippled for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to be well?”

We all want our church to be well. We all want our church to be a place that is healthy. But Jesus asked this man pointedly because it seems the man had resigned himself to the reality that he would not be healed because he had no one to help him. The lesson in this story is that there needs to be a desire to make the effort to become well.

Do we actually want to be well? Are we willing to step out of our comfort zone, and do we have the desire to make the effort to do what the Lord wants us to do?

The truth is many of us are in churches that were started by risk takers and entrepreneurs. They were started by people willing to do whatever is necessary and embrace the required change for the sake of God’s Kingdom. Perhaps we need to be reminded of that: THAT DNA is OUR DNA! That is the history of our church! “We ARE already what we need TO BE!” We simply need to embrace our past and become that again!

Could it be that while we sit poolside, we desire to be healthy but are overcome with the steps that it will take to be well and instead wait for a miracle to get us to the pool?

The first obstacle to being well and doing what is necessary to turn our church toward a brighter future is the attitude: **“We are fine! Things will eventually turn around if we keep being faithful!”**

The second obstacle to turning a church around is the attitude: **“We want what we had, even though what we had/have isn’t working.”**

In Numbers 14:1-4 we read that, “All the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and the whole congregation said to them, ‘Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in the wilderness!’... So they said to one another, ‘Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt.’”

This scripture isn’t a perfect match for our longing for what was but it does give us an insight into the human instinct and longing for the known, the predictable, the comfort of what was, even though what was isn’t working. It also stands as a lesson that sometimes strong leaders like Aaron and Moses do face hurdles even though they are going in the right direction.

It takes time (40+ years in their case). The road to turnaround sometimes is long and hard and seems harder than going back to status quo even though that means certain death (i.e. slavery in Egypt).

So there is Biblical precedent for these normal human/church instincts to just stay poolside and not jump in. There is fear because we have become comfortable and we’re hoping that what we’re currently doing will eventually work again!

Questions:

1. How much do I/we identify with the two obstacles above? Are these attitudes that we have in our church? Are they barriers to a brighter future for our congregation? How so?
2. How does the story we tell ourselves (perception) compare to what's actually happening (reality)?
 - What are our attendance trends? Financial trends? Baptism trends?
 - Are we seeing new people come? Are they staying?
 - Where will our church be in 5 years?
 - Does the church have a history of responding to a changing population? Increasing population? Decreasing population? Does the church have a history of stepping out in faith?
3. What lessons can we learn from these trends and what do they reveal about both our current reality and our future if things remain the same?
4. How much of a "whatever it takes" attitude does our congregation have and how willing are we to embrace the pain of change?

CONVERSATION PART 2

From Hopeless to Hope-Filled!

Many churches are feeling a sense of hopelessness.

“Our congregation is shrinking.”

“Our offerings are decreasing.”

“We can’t afford a fulltime pastor.”

“We rarely see new people and often when we do, they don’t stay.”

Jesus didn’t make an assumption in John 5. He asked the crippled man, “Do you WANT to be well?” That is, are you willing to do what is required to be well or have you become so comfortable with your current reality that you longer are even trying to get into the healing pool?

Jesus needed to know that he wanted to be WELL! He asks the same of your church. Do you want to be WELL? Are you willing to do what is required or have you become comfortable in your current reality? The truth is this: Hope-LESS can become hope-FILLED!

Questions:

1. *Take 10 minutes and brainstorm: What would it look like for our church to be well? Whiteboard your ideas of what your church would be doing and what you would be experiencing if you were WELL.*
2. *There are five essentials for a church to be well:*
 - *An engaging worship service people experience God.*
 - *A culture of prayer.*
 - *A culture of discipleship where people are growing in faith.*
 - *A culture of fellowship where people regularly enjoying each other’s company and serving each other.*
 - *A culture of community outreach where people serve their neighbours.*

In what practical ways could our church experience greater wellness in each of these five areas?

3. *What fears do we/you have about our church’s future? (Fear of closing? Fear of change? Fear of losing people? Fear of offending? Others?)*

4. *Some churches striving to be WELL, have taken the step to partner with another healthy church(es) in their area. Some have partnered for a “season” in specific ministries to increase effectiveness for both churches.*

Some churches partner because one church is strong in one area and another strong in another area of ministry. Together they strengthen each other.

Others have in fact taken the step to merge their congregations into one or experiment with other options of merger, because they believe they can be more Kingdom effective by joining together.

Are there options that our church could consider to increase our effectiveness as a congregation? Could a partnership be something we should consider?

5. *What are the next steps we need to take coming out of this meeting?*

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Visit atlanticbaptist.ca/churchlink for additional information and examples, including written and video stories from other churches in Atlantic Canada.