



THE IDIOT'S DO-IT-YOURSELF GUIDE TO TURNING YOUR CONGREGATION UPSIDE DOWN AND INSIDE OUT.

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I decided to call this do-it-yourself guide for turning your congregation upside down and inside out an 'idiot's guide' for three reasons:

1. Firstly, because *it is by an 'idiot'*. When I was younger I was called a 'radical'. But now I'm older I am called an 'idiot'. After all, they say, 'If you *are not* a radical when you're younger—you have no soul! But if you *still aspire to be* a radical when you're older—you have no sense!'
2. Secondly, because *it is for 'idiots'*. It's common sense, not rocket science. It's directed at ordinary people, not astral physicists. And it focuses on the significance of facts as obvious as 'the noses on our faces', and 'the stupidity of cutting off our noses to spite our faces!'
3. Thirdly, because *anyone who takes the advice given in this guide seriously, will undoubtedly be considered a 'fool' by his or her wiser colleagues*. If you follow the advice in this guide, chances are it will lead to your being fired, or shot, or at least given the cold shoulder!

However, as the Apostle Paul - whom I have chosen as the patron saint of this study guide—says:

"Think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were "*wise*" by human standards. But God chose the "*foolish things*" of the world to shame the "*wise*"; he chose the "*lowly things*" of this world—the "*things that are not*"—to nullify "*the things that are*".' I Cor. I:26-28

Now, no doubt, some of you maybe already thinking that the *real* reason it should be called an 'idiot's guide' is because I have chosen the Apostle Paul—an arch-conservative—as my patron saint of change.

But there is method in my madness. Let me try to explain...

Before he was converted, during his days as a Pharisee, the Apostle Paul—known as Saul—was certainly well-known as a staunch arch-conservative, who would vigorously resist any radical change to his religious tradition.

In Philippians (3:5-6) Paul said that he was ‘circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless: as for zeal, persecuting (anyone who tried to bring radical change in the name of Jesus).’

In fact, the first time we meet Paul in the Bible, he is supervising the stoning of the Stephen (Acts 8:1)—whom the apostles saw as a ‘gracious’ man, ‘full of the Holy Spirit’, (6: 5)—but whom Saul, the ‘Pharisee’, saw as a dangerous ‘blasphemer’ who needed to be publicly executed as soon as possible (6:11).

However, on the Road to Damascus, Paul was personally confronted by the ‘once-dead-now-risen’ revolutionary Jesus, who pointed out to him that to oppress people working for Christ-like change was to oppress Christ himself.

‘As he neared Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him,
“Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”
“Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked.
“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. (Acts 9:3-5)

And for Saul, that realization meant that everything had to change! So he and his friends took their whole world to task, and set out to reshape it, bit-by-bit, according to the upside-down inside-out values of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

To the great consternation of the key stakeholders in the status quo, Paul and his co-conspirators were ‘able to do immeasurably more’ than one might have imagined they would have (Eph 3:20).

They chose the “*things that are not*”—to nullify “*the things that are*”.’ (I Cor. I:26-28). And time and time again they helped ‘*foolish*’ people confuse the ‘*wise*’ and ‘*weak*’ people confound the ‘*strong*’ (1 Cor. 1:26) in their quest to develop *radically inclusive and egalitarian communities of faith* in the midst of an established religious tradition which had previously disenfranchised them.

They succeeded to such an extent that one horrified observer is recorded as saying—“*these people have turned the whole world upside down!*” (Acts 17:6)

Now the question is—how did they do it? How did the Apostle Paul and his co-conspirators manage to turn the ‘whole world’ upside down and inside out?

That is the question I’d like to answer. For I am convinced a ‘*conservative’s radical strategy to change*’ is as relevant today as ever it was.

Paul’s D-I-Y strategy for turning a congregation upside-down and inside-out seemed to consist of five key components—

- 1. A Transformational Mindset.**
- 2. Careful Preparatory Steps.**
- 3. Sensible Long-Term Tactics.**
- 4. Shrewd Short-Term Tactics.**
- 5. And Blood, Sweat, And Tears.**

1. A Transformational Mindset.

Paul’s strategy was based on a passionate commitment to transformation.

‘I urge you, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is his good, pleasing and perfect will.’ Rom12:1-2

For Paul, being *transformed*—being *a subject and agent of transformation*—as opposed to being *conformed* to the current secular and religious patterns of operation in the world—was his *spiritual mission, his way of worshipping God*.

And Paul had a very clear vision of the kind of radically-Christ-like, thoroughly-compassionate, congregational transformation that he wanted to bring about:

‘Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in ... love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of every-body. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at

peace with everyone. “If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink”. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.’

‘For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a person’s gift is prophesying, let them use it in proportion to their faith. If it is serving, let them serve; if it is teaching, let them teach; if it is encouraging, let them encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let them give generously; if it is leadership, let them lead diligently; if it is showing mercy, let them do it cheerfully.’ Rom 12: 9-21; 3-8

Paul envisaged a transformed congregation as...

1) A safe space —

‘Practice hospitality’. And, ‘as much as possible, be at peace with everybody.’
Rom12: 13,18

2) where a person is accepted as a person;

‘Love must be sincere’. ‘Be devoted to one another in love’. ‘Honor one another...’
Rom12: 9-10

3) where unity and diversity are respected;

‘In Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us’.
Rom12: 5-6

4) where no-one is treated as unimportant;

‘Do not be proud, but associate with people of low position’. ‘Honor one another above yourselves.’
Rom 12:16,10

5) where everyone is taken into account;

‘As much as possible, live at peace with everyone’. ‘Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.’
Rom 12: 18,17

6) and where there is a commitment to do justice—regardless.

‘Share with all God’s people who are in need’. ‘Do not repay anyone evil for evil.’

“If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them a drink”.
Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
Rom 12:13,17,20-21

If we are going to turn our world upside down and inside out like Paul, we will need to be fired by the same passion for the same vision of transformation as he was!

However, we need to remember, Paul did not only have a passionate commitment, but he also had practical commitment to transformation...

As a conservative, Paul knew how resistant—and reactive—people could be to change. He had change agents beaten up and thrown into prison. And he personally supervised the public stoning of Stephen. (Acts 7 & 8) So when he was advising change agents, Paul urged them to proceed with great caution.

Paul quickly followed his call (in Romans 12) for them ‘to offer (their) bodies as living sacrifices’ in the service of ‘transformation’ which is ‘pleasing to God’, with his call (in Romans 13) for them to conform—by ‘submitting themselves to the authorities’ as much as they could - without compromising their commitment to transformation.

There are probably many reasons Paul gave them this advice. But I can think of a couple of very important practical reasons that he gave them this advice.

On the one hand, Paul was convinced that if they *did not conform*, or ‘submit’ to some degree, they would quickly provoke the ‘wrath’ of the authorities, who—he warned them— ‘did not bear the sword in vain!’ (Rom 13: 1-4)

‘I have been in prison frequently, flogged severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. (And) once I was stoned.’ 1 Cor 11: 23-26

On the other hand, Paul was convinced that if they *did conform*, or ‘submit’ to some degree, people would take their adjustment and their accommodation as a sign of ‘respect’ and be more likely to reciprocate. (Rom.13:7)

‘Though I am free, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.’ (1 Cor 9:19-23)

So, once we have decided to work for the transformation of a congregation, Paul tell us we need to proceed with care, conforming to the requirements of the institution as much as we can, while reserving the right to refuse to conform to any requirement which is contrary to 'the law of love'. (Rom13:8),

Because we refuse to conform to anything contrary to our conscience we are ultimately a threat to the institution. But because we are willing to do everything we can to conform, the institution does not immediately perceive us as a threat or treat us as a threat. Which gives us time to work towards change.

We must always remember the change we seek is not Machiavellian but Pauline; and, as such, we must be committed to 'do what is right in the eyes of everybody'!

2. Careful Preparatory Steps.

The first step Paul took in working for change was to seek a sponsor.

Paul's sponsors included people like Priscilla and Aquila—whom he stayed with and worked with—and who introduced him to the synagogue in Corinth (Acts 18:1-3)—and who saved his skin when he got into trouble! (Rom.16:3)

A *sponsor* is person in a congregation who *empathises* with us and who is *willing to give us a bit of space to work for change*. It doesn't have to be a lot of space. Even a little space can make a lot of difference. It can give us room to move in an environment that would otherwise restrict our movements.

For a sponsor to be effective, he or she needs to be in a *position* within the congregation to not only *provide* us with space, but also *protect* that space.

If we can't find an effective sponsor our chances of success are close to zero.

Being a Baptist, the first local church I went to was a Baptist Church. But I had been unable to find anyone in the church who was the least bit interested in the kind of things that I wanted to do. So I tried the next church nearest my house. It was an Anglican Church—that went by the auspicious name of 'St Andrew's'.

When I met the minister, I knew I had found the sponsor that I was looking for. His name was John Arnold. He'd lived in

Pakistan at the same time we'd lived in India. We both spoke Urdu. And both wanted to develop the inclusive kind of church community the subcontinent teaches people is so important.

The second step Paul took was to find at least a couple of supporters.

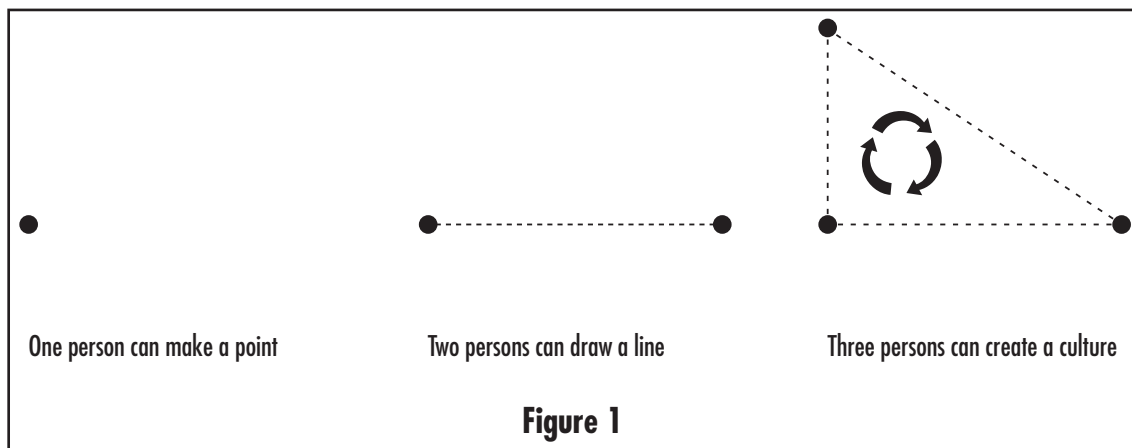
Paul's supporters included people like Barnabas, Mark, Silas, and Luke. These people publicly supported Paul in his campaign to change the world. They set out on the great adventure together, risked the hazards of the road, argued about the route they should take, went their separate ways, got back together again, and shared the joys and sorrows of the grand endeavor. (Acts)

A sponsor is a person in a church who empathizes with us and who is willing to give us a space to work for change. A supporter is a person who sympathizes with us and who is willing to join us—wholeheartedly—in our work for change.

For a *sponsor* to be effective, he or she needs to be in a *position* within the congregation to not only *provide* us with space, but also *protect* that space. For a *supporter* to be effective, he or she needs to share our *pain* about the *closed* nature of the system, and be willing to *help* us in trying to *open* it up.

Whereas we need to only find *one* sponsor in a church to get a bit of *space*; we need to find at least *two* other supporters in order to develop a *culture*.

One person can make a *point*. *Two* persons can draw a *line*. But it takes at least *three* persons to create a *culture*, which can demonstrate an alternative. (See Figure 1)

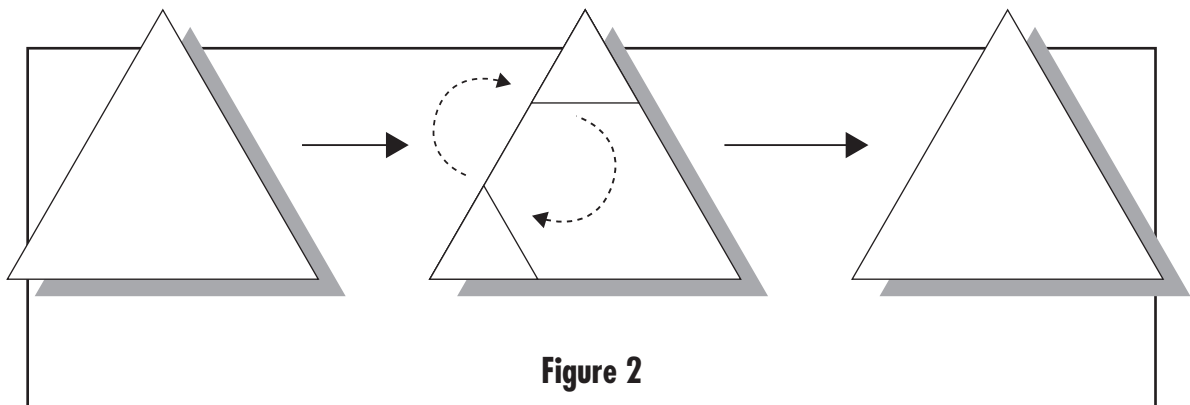


When we decided to get involved with St Andrew's, our friends Chris and Ruth Todd decided to get involved with us. We quickly developed a rapport with people already involved in the church, like Jeremy Liyange, Betti Chappelle, and Norma Spice. And this network was big enough to begin our own DIY church reformation!

3. Sensible Long-Term Tactics.

The most common way of trying to change an organisation has always been to mobilise a group of disenfranchised and disaffected people at the bottom to overthrow the people at the top, and, thereby, institute a change of regime. This can be done either violently, by revolution; or non-violently, by election. Either way, the more things change, the more they stay the same. Because no matter how many times you may change the regime, the system remains.

(See Fig. 2)



Paul's strategy was based on Jesus' much more innovative, alternative stratagem - of not trying to change the regime—but the system itself!

Jesus' stratagem was simply to persistently deny hierarchy, advocate mutuality, and reframe all his relationships, over time, in terms of equality.

Time and time again Jesus told the people who were with him to reject any kind of hierarchical modus operandi, and embrace the practice of mutuality.

Jesus said:

‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. *Not so with you*. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant...just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’ Matt.20: 20-28

‘You are *not* to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you’ve only one Master and you are all equals. And do *not* call anyone on earth ‘Father,’ for you have one Father, in heaven. (And you are all brothers and sisters). The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts themselves will be humbled, and whoever humbles themselves will be exalted’.
Matt.23: 8-12

To start with, the disciples related to Jesus as their ‘Rabbi’, but over time, he reframed his relationship with all of them in clear, radically egalitarian terms.

After three years, Jesus said to them:

‘*I no longer call you servants*, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, *I have called you friends*, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.’
John 15: 15

Paul took on Jesus’ strategy and made it his own. He denied hierarchy, advocated mutuality, and reframed relationships in terms of equality.*

He told the church at Galatia that he believed all people were equal in Christ:

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female,
for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Gal.3: 28

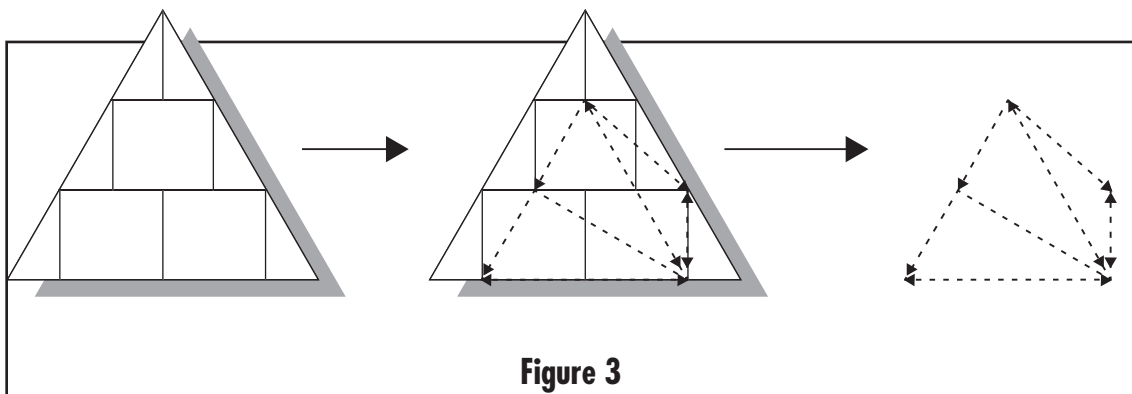
And when he wrote a letter on behalf of Onesimus—an escaped slave—to Philemon—his former master—Paul asked Philemon to welcome Onesimus back, ‘no longer as a slave’, but as ‘you would welcome me’, ‘a dear brother.’

“I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me. I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you. I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced. Perhaps the reason

* For detailed scholarly evidence of this, see p159-181 Reframing Paul (IVP) by Mark Strom.

he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good - *no longer as a slave*, but better than a slave, *as a dear brother*. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord. So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me.” Phil. 1: 12-18

Paul’s strategy for change in the synagogue wasn’t to mobilize the slaves against the masters, but white-ant hierarchy, build up mutuality, and—very carefully—reframe inequality in terms of equality, one relationship at a time. (See Fig. 3)



The kind of changes I hoped and prayed for at St Andrew’s, had nothing to do with the ordination of minorities. I wanted system change, not merely regime change. So rather than fight the current regime, I tried to transform the entire system, by implementing Paul’s strategy of white-anting hierarchy, building up mutuality, and reframing the inequality in terms of equality, one relationship at a time.

The first relationship I started on was my relationship with the ‘rector’. I didn’t react to the title. I just ignored it. And related to John as person as respectfully as I could. When John moved on, and Alan replaced him, I treated him the same way.

In order to reframe the relationship in terms of equality, I used to ask Alan out to have a coffee in a local coffee shop. Out of his office. Where he was the ‘pastor’ and I was the ‘parishioner’. To a coffee shop. Where we were just ‘a couple of middle-aged men’. And as we shared our joys and sorrows over a cuppa, we became good friends.

We noticed that when we became friends, the dynamics of the interaction between us and our friends began to change. There was a greater degree of trust, and that made everyone feel a little safer. There was also a little more acceptance and respect.

People felt that if they spoke, they would be heard—and they could shape decisions that were being made. And this relational change led to organisational change.

4. Shrewd Short-Term Tactics.

When people at the bottom of an organisation feel powerless, they think that if only they were able to work their way to the top of the organisation they would be in a position to have the power to bring about the change that they desire. (See Fig. 4)

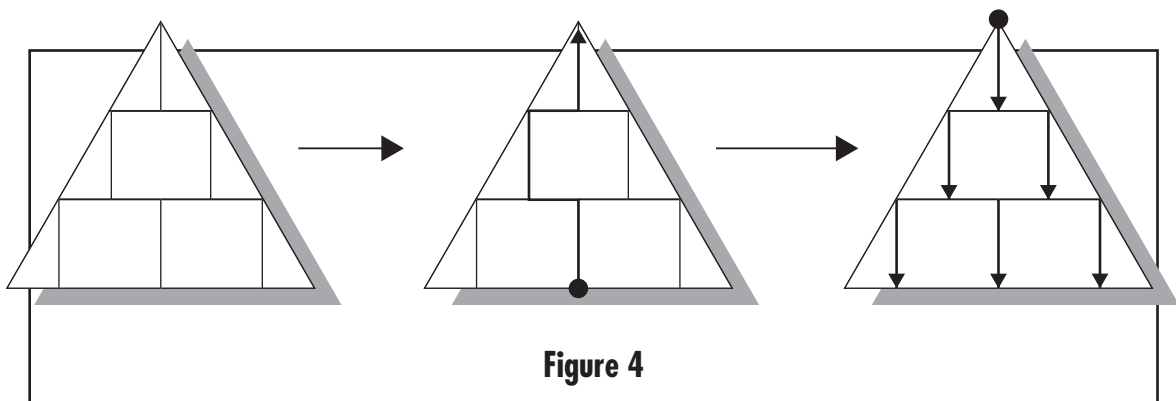


Figure 4

But anybody who has got to the top of an organisation will say that, actually, people at the top are as constrained by the structure as people at the bottom.

I think that maybe an overstatement, but there is undoubtedly some truth in it.

Paul, certainly, did not encourage anybody to work their way from the bottom to the top of any system they happened to find themselves in.

He said:

'Everyone should remain in the situation which they were in when God called them.'
1 Cor.7:20

He said:

'Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you...'
1 Cor.7:21a

Then added, rather enigmatically,

'although if you can gain your freedom, do so!'
1 Cor.7:21b

On the surface, this seems typical of Paul's advice—a bit of a contradiction! No wonder Peter said 'his letters contain things that are hard to understand.' (1 Pet.3:16) Ain't that the truth!

But, if we go a little deeper, we will discover there is more to this contradiction than immediately meets the eye. On the one hand, he is counseling people not to move up in the system; on the other hand, he is counseling them to gain their freedom if they can. So, where—we need to ask—does Paul expect people—oppressed by the system—to find freedom from oppression, without moving up in the system? I think the only answer is - by moving out!

Paul encouraged everybody not to move from the bottom to the top, but from the centre to the edge of any system that they found themselves in.

Again, in this regard, Paul based his strategy on Jesus' innovative stratagem.

Jesus publicly associated with the synagogue—not only by attending, but also by participating, 'as was his custom', in congregational meetings. (Luke 4:16)

But, *Jesus never attempted to move up in the organization. He deliberately moved out on to the edge of the institution. And, locating himself 'on the sidelines', rather than 'in the main game', gave him some great advantages.*

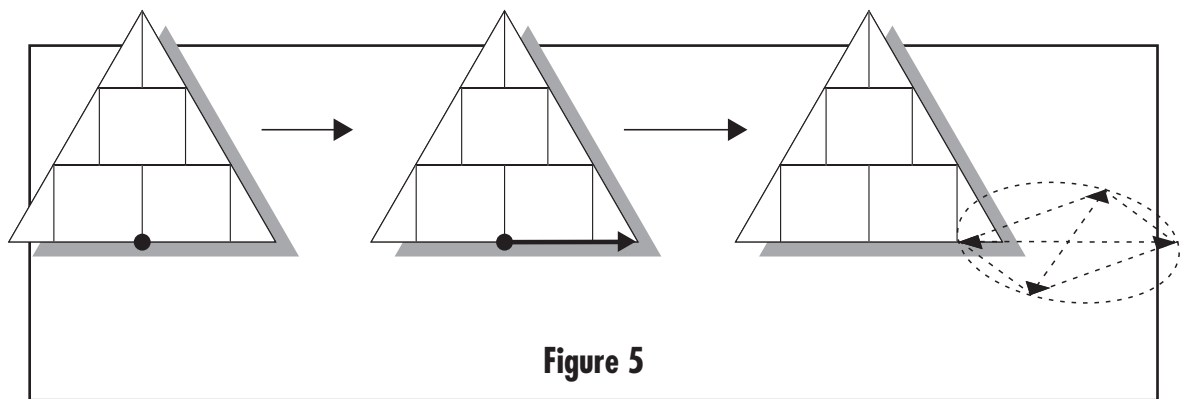
One, it gave him perspective. From the sidelines he was able to see the whole field, and see what needed to be done to improve the game. Two, it gave him opportunity. On the sidelines he was far enough away from the game to be beyond its immediate control, yet close enough to affect the way it played out. Three, it

gave him *time*. On the sidelines *he was able to develop his short-term alternatives to the system while he worked on his long-term transform-ation of the system*. Four, it gave him *space*. On the sidelines *he was able to demonstrate the alternatives he developed in the eyes of everyone, so they could assess for themselves whether they wanted to adopt them - or not*. Five, it gave him a *position from which he could advocate change, without being in a position to impose the change he advocated on anyone*. So people knew *they were truly free* to adopt the change—or not to—as they so desired. And - because that made the change process much less threatening to the people in the synagogue - *it gave Jesus greater freedom* to experiment more!

Paul adopted the same strategy Jesus used concerning the synagogue. He did not attempt to move up in the organization of the synagogue. But instead moved to the edge of the system, developing alternatives people were free to accept, if they succeeded — or free to reject, if they failed.

Paul's trade as a tent-maker was crucial to his strategy. It was his occupation when he was 'called', and he stuck with it, just as he had advised others to do.
(Acts 18:3; 1 Cor.7:20-21)

As a position, it was low in status. But it was a self-supporting profession that gave Paul a high degree of independence, 'out on the cutting edge of society'. And he used it to develop his ecclesia—the communities of his dreams. (See Fig. 5)



In these experimental groups, Paul worked side by side with slaves, ate and drank with 'clean' and 'unclean' alike—and encouraged the people around him to explore the possibility of 'living in harmony with one another'. (Rom.12: 16)

Paul's prayer was that his experiments would not stay 'on the margins'. But, that his ecclesia, would become 'the centre of attention'. And not only be admired, but also be adopted as the modus operandi of society.

Paul wrote to the churches of his day, saying

'I urge you to *imitate me!*'

1 Cor. 4: 16

'For you yourselves know how *you ought to follow our example*. We were not idle when we were with you. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling. (And) *we did this in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow.*'

11 Thes. 3:7-9

'*Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.*'

1 Cor.11: 1

'If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then *make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose*. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. *Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ:*

Phil. 2:1-3

Paul worked for the day when synagogues would adopt the *modus operandi* of his *ecclesia* and congregations would develop into *Christ-like communities*. (See Fig. 6)

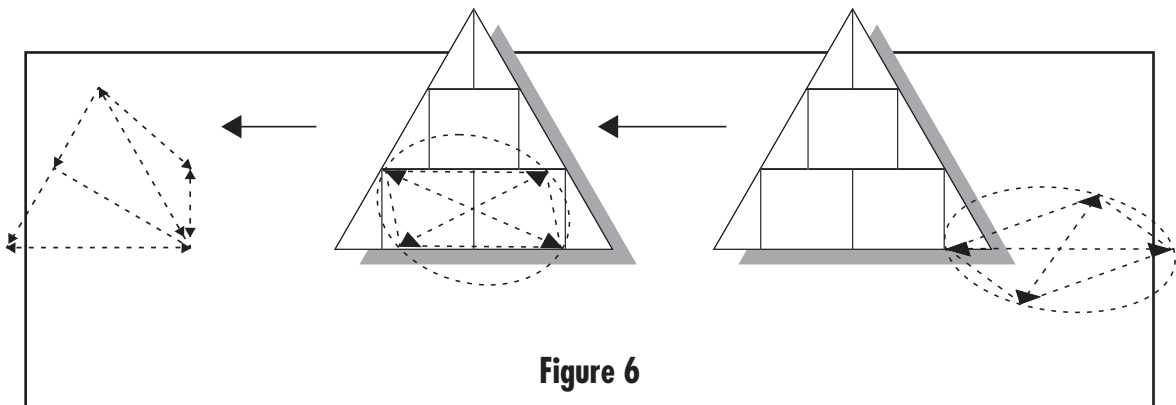


Figure 6

The kind of change I hoped and prayed for at St Andrew's, was long-term change Which I approached by implementing Paul's strategy of white-anting hierarchy, building up mutuality, and reframing the inequality in terms of equality,

one relationship at a time, But, long-term change nearly always takes a long time.

So, in the meantime, I thought I'd have a go at carrying out short-term changes. Which I approached by implementing Paul's strategy of moving out to the edge, developing some creative alternatives, and waiting for the right moment to bring our experiments back from the margins into the very centre of congregational life.

A few of our friends had had a go at changing St. Andrew's, by joining the parish council, and trying to influence the direction of the church through the formal decision making mechanisms of the church. But they found themselves blocked at every turn - by precedent here, and protocol there—Until they became so disheartened, they finally threw their hands up in the air, and left the church in despair.

So Ange and I, and our friends, decided to explore the possibilities of experimenting with some community involvement—not formally, as part of a formal church programme; but informally, as an informal community response. Hence, though our experiment was associated with the church, it wasn't be processed through the church. And—as a consequence—wasn't controlled by the church. Which left us free to operate, without any interference—far enough from the church, not to be a threat; but close enough to the church, to be at least a potential catalyst for change!

We began visiting isolated people in our area. Talking to them. Listening to them tell us something of their modest aspirations. Like getting out of the hostel every now and again, and having a nice meal with some friends. And, as a result of these discussions, we decided to start what we called a “community meal”.

Right from the start, the community meal was a shared meal. In fact, some people call the “community meal” the

“share meal”. The term indicated the idea that the meal was not a “welfare” event, where others provide for us, but a “friendship” event, where we provide for one another.

Those who had a lot were encouraged to bring a lot. Those who had a little were encouraged to bring a little. But everybody was encouraged to bring something along for the meal. Some people used to bring casseroles in crock pots. Others would bring a few tea bags, or a small milk carton. Still others would check out the rubbish bins on the way, and bring whatever treasures they could find...

When there was just a few of us we used to meet in someone’s house, but as time went on, word got out, the numbers of people who dropped in for dinner grew, and we had to move into a community centre. Over the next two or three years some fifty to a hundred people used to gather regularly, every fortnight, on a Friday night, at the House Of Freedom.

The community meal was a party to which everyone was welcome. No matter how badly dressed, or badly distressed. And, as such, it became a party for everyone in the area who was left off everyone else’s party list—including some of the most wonderfully fragile, and freaked out characters in the inner city.

The people who came, appreciated the community meal so much, they’d plan for the next one as soon as the last one was over. Older women would get a new rinse, on special at the local hairdressing salon. Older men would get a new suit, for a song from the local op shop. Young punks would sport their fashionable, but savagely misnamed safety pins, poked through the flesh on various parts of their anatomy.

When we got together, we probably looked like a sideshow, but we always looked upon one another as friends. We shared not only the latest neighbourhood gossip, but also some of the deepest parts of our selves, the best kept secrets of our lives.

Because of its undeniable beauty, when an A.B.C. television crew were doing a documentary on St. Andrew’s, the church

suggested a special segment on the community meal. And when the documentary on St. Andrew's featured the community meal as part of the church programme, it represented the moment that our informal experiment was formally adopted by St. Andrew's.

A little while later we asked if we could move the community meal onto the church premises. Our request was granted. And, some would say, that since that day, St. Andrew's has never been the same again.

Now many people think there is no point working for change on the *margins*.

But I think there is probably often no other place we can work - except on the margins. Until there is a *kairos moment* of some kind or other, which can *open* up a *closed* system, and can give us a chance to take the changes we have accomplished on the *margins*, and place them—for serious consideration - *right at the heart of the congregation*.

It doesn't matter whether the *kairos moment* comes sooner or later. What matters is: *we recognise it when the moment comes, and use it to manoeuvre our movement for change, from out on the edge, into the middle of the turmoil*.

We should always use a *crisis* in an institution to advocate the kind of change that can facilitate the development of a healthy community. Whether the *crisis* be *conflict* in the group, *criticism* of the organisation, or a *succession* in the leadership - *we can use it* - to encourage people *to consider serious change*.

I continued to attend St. Andrew's for quite a few years before I saw any significant change. Then one day the minister, John Arnold, came to see me about a crisis he was facing in the church.

Apparently, he was scheduled to go away on sabbatical. But there was no priest to replace him. He'd discussed it with the parish council. They had an idea as to who might help with the morning service, but didn't have a clue as to whom they might ask to help with the evening service.

So John enquired whether a friend and I would take over the evening service in his absence. Both of us immediately saw it

as an opportunity to bring some of the changes we had been involved with, on the periphery, into the centre of the church.

So we said to John, we would be willing to take on the job, as long as we could turn the service into a church event that the people coming to the community meal would feel comfortable with.

He said he was more than happy with that, as he was concerned that the church not only provide a space for people to have a meal, but a place for people to be at home.

So with John's approval, in John's absence, we began to transform the service, from a fairly rigid form, that very few people in the community could relate to, into a much more relaxed format, that made many people from the community feel really at home.

We particularly tried to change the service, so it could be of more meaningful to some of the people with physical, intellectual, and psychiatric disabilities that we knew. We made it more personal and more relational, inviting participation and tolerating interruptions.

We made it more simple and more practical, raising issues and sharing responses. And we tried to make it more inspiring and more empowering, by not only by praying, but also partying together at church.

When John returned from his sabbatical, I'm sure he couldn't believe his eyes to begin with. Instead of six, there were over sixty people at the service, thirty per cent of whom had a serious disability, but all of whom were a hundred per cent involved in the event, singing and dancing along with the everybody else.

Needless to say, had John not supported the change, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, for it to be sustained. But, in spite of his misgivings over certain matters, (which he spoke to us about, and which we did our best to take into account,) John gave the change his blessing, and let the revolution roll on.

The significance of such a transformation should not be discounted. Churches can be notoriously hierarchical, patriarchal, patronising, and domesticating. It's almost impossible for some people to imagine a church that is really mutual, equitable, egalitarian, and liberating. Yet, that's exactly the miracle that I see with my own eyes each week at St. Andrew's!

Every Sunday night our community gathers in the basement of the church. People amble in in dribs and drabs. And gradually a large motley crowd from around the neighbourhood forms into a large multilayered circle of humanity.

The people that come don't leave their problems at the door. We know our problems are as welcome as we are. So we come with our distress, depression, neuroses, psychoses and schizophrenia. In the hope that, together, we can reaffirm our significance as people over and above our problems.

We begin by lighting a candle, to remind us of the radiance of hope we have that shines in the midst of our despair. Which sounds very wonderful, but is often the occasion for a furore. As different people fight for the right to light the candle.

And, having settled that dispute, actually have so much difficulty in lighting the candle, without burning themselves that they burst into a sustained bout of profanity as the service begins.

Like other churches, we enjoy singing together. But when we sing together it's like no other church I know.

Some of the people that come just love to sing their favourite songs and demand that we sing them every time we meet. Once Brad gets started singing no one can stop him. He's a human juke box, with no off switch and an endless supply of songs.

Some of the people that come can neither hear or speak, but pick up on the vibes when we sing, running to and fro, making whatever noises they can, in order to join in. Ron got into clapping so much once, he didn't quit for the rest of the night. He clapped right through the songs, right through the sermon, right through the passing of the peace and right through the closing prayers.

Everyone is encouraged to participate in the service, on the assumption that everyone, regardless of our disability, has a contribution to make through the service to one another's lives.

The first time Sally led the service she did sit in a back seat and spoke so quietly no-one knew what was going on. The second time Sally led the service she actually sat at the front, where everyone could see her, but no-one could hear her. The third time Sally led the service she not only sat at the front, where everyone could see her, but also she actually spoke loud enough for everyone to hear her.

I can never forget the time Kate and Jane took the service. Kate and Jane are both solo mothers who have both suffered the indignity of having both their children taken away from them by the department of family services. And as a consequence, Kate and Jane have both felt quite suicidal at times. But, never has the gospel been more faithfully proclaimed in that church than it was the night that Kate and Jane spoke. The good news, according to Kate and Jane, is : “though we may be treated like shit, and be tempted to feel like shit, we're not shit. For the love of God can make us feel as if we're as good as gold—as good as gold!”

Through the alchemy at work at St. Andrews the locality is coming to church, the church is becoming a community, and the people are finding the confidence they'd lost, to be themselves, and to realise their amazing potential as men and women made in the image of God!

5. Blood, Sweat, And Tears.

It may sound easy. But it isn't. Because the strategy of transformation Paul advocated entails a struggle - saturated in blood, sweat, and tears!

If we are to play a constructive, rather than destructive, role in our churches we cannot afford to be *reactive*—treating others as they treat us—we need to be *proactive*—treating others like we would like to be treated ourselves.

Paul says -

'Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. "If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink". Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.'

Rom.12: 8-18

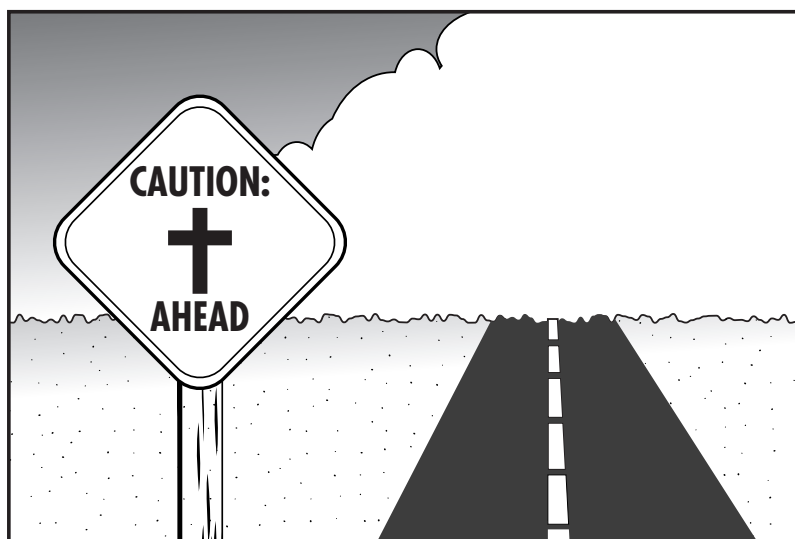
There can be no transformation without grace, and no grace without suffering.

The *transformation* we seek is *good*. We can only expect *good outcomes* from *good input*. Our *ability to give consistently good input* depends on our *willingness to do good consistently*. And our *willingness to do good consistently* is dependent on our *capacity to suffer evil without reacting or retaliating in kind*. Paul says that, for him to bring about change in the church, he had...

'to fill up in (his) flesh what (was) still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.'

Col. 1::24

So it should not surprise us that *for us* to bring change in the church that we too will have to '*fill up in (our) flesh*' the blood, sweat, and tears that are '*still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, the church!*'



The long-term and short-term changes we managed to achieve at St. Andrew's only came after years of tireless and thankless work on the sidelines, behind the scenes. And, over the years, such efforts have met with failure more often than success.

In my time, I've been criticised, censured, disciplined, dressed down, beaten up, tossed out on the street, officially excommunicated and publicly sent to Coventry. Working for change is a 'mug's game'. God only knows why anyone should try!