



Design For Ministry™

Depth Perception

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Changes in the wind

Only a few years ago denominational staff described their work as *parenting* children – their children being congregations and their leaders. Pastors used the same language to describe their relationship with the congregation. Today this image is shifting. We are moving from parenting to *partnership*. “Children” finally get to grow up and gain independence! New structures grow from mutual negotiation since denominations can no longer play benevolent parent.

Similarly, the operating word to describe relationships within denominational structures used to be *service*. Sadly, even though the language seemed to describe how a denominational office served its regional structures, how regional structures served congregations, and how pastors served congregations, these organizations actually expected service to run the other direction. Now, however, service is shifting to something else. Now the word *collaboration* is heard more frequently. It seems we are beginning to understand that service is a joint effort and that service is given to a world that knows many hungers, rather than service being something one demands from another.

There is yet one more wind of change. This wind already shifted once in my lifetime and it is shifting again. When I was a boy most church leaders were used to an *organic* method of getting ministry work done. A need was described and people stepped in to help. This gave way to social *services and programs* – a more structured way to sustain ministry. Now services and programs are shifting to *enterprise* – a way to gain better investment from those serving and those being served. Each shift comes for two reasons:

1. The threat that ministry will cease due to lack of funds or volunteerism.
2. The educational background of those fixing problems associated with item number one (Think of the vocational shift from agriculture to the service sector to business over the past sixty years).

Winds of change are usually fresh breezes. They can be welcome, helpful, even healing. They don't have to be liked, but they should never be ignored. Organizations that let these breezes blow will be those most capable of renewing their mission and of gaining loyalty, participation and financial support among younger and newer members.

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-mark

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