How one congregation began its journey into transformation

My mother was dying. I was determined to get help for her. Yet, no help was forthcoming. She told me that everything was okay and not to worry.

I awoke from this dream in the summer of 2001 and told my wife that it was not about my mother but about the church. The church was dying, and I was not doing much about it.

So, as we began a ministry at Faith Christian Church, Omaha, Neb., seven years ago, we began an intentional journey of transformation as church, so that the members and participants would become more Christ-like and the church as a whole would become more like the body of Christ.

We began our journey by focusing on spiritual growth for the disciples at Faith. We transformed our elders to become more spiritual leaders. We emphasized and offered training in spiritual practices or disciplines (for example, daily prayer and daily Bible reading). We offered spiritual retreats and spiritual gifts discovery events. We offered more Bible studies led by lay people. We offered alternative worship experiences (prayer and contemporary). We offered a Forty Days of Purpose Campaign, with a Disciples' emphasis (which eventually tripled the number of our small groups).

After three years of being transformed spiritually (an ongoing activity), we gathered a group of 12 leaders and participants in the congregation to become a "vision community" and lead us strategically in a governance restructure of the church.

The Vision Community took a year to pray, read books, and consider the options. It offered a spiritual retreat to the congregation-led completely by lay leaders.

The congregation had a governance structure that necessitated the filling of 77 positions by a committee of 12 people. This process usually took the better part of a year's time. And, at its end, not all the positions were filled. We were very frustrated with this structure.

We continued to meet and hone a structure toward which we thought and felt that God was leading us. The structure that God inspired us to adopt consisted of a governing board of six elders (who may or may not serve at the communion table on Sunday). These elders (and all those in positions of leadership) were to be chosen based on their interests and spiritual gifts.

These six elders were spiritual leaders who can then call or recruit other spiritual leaders (called deacons-not necessarily those who pass the plates on Sunday) who, in turn, call or recruit members of teams, which then do the ministry and mission of the church.

We then offered six forums, at different times and days of the week in the spring of 2005, for members of the congregation to meet the team that designed the new structure, ask questions, and offer concerns.

In May of 2005, the congregation then voted to suspend the current by-laws to "live into" this new structure in a trial period lasting 18 months.

The vote was ... (Part One of two parts—to be continued in the next edition of Home Mission Advocate!).

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Events on Congregational Transformation

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